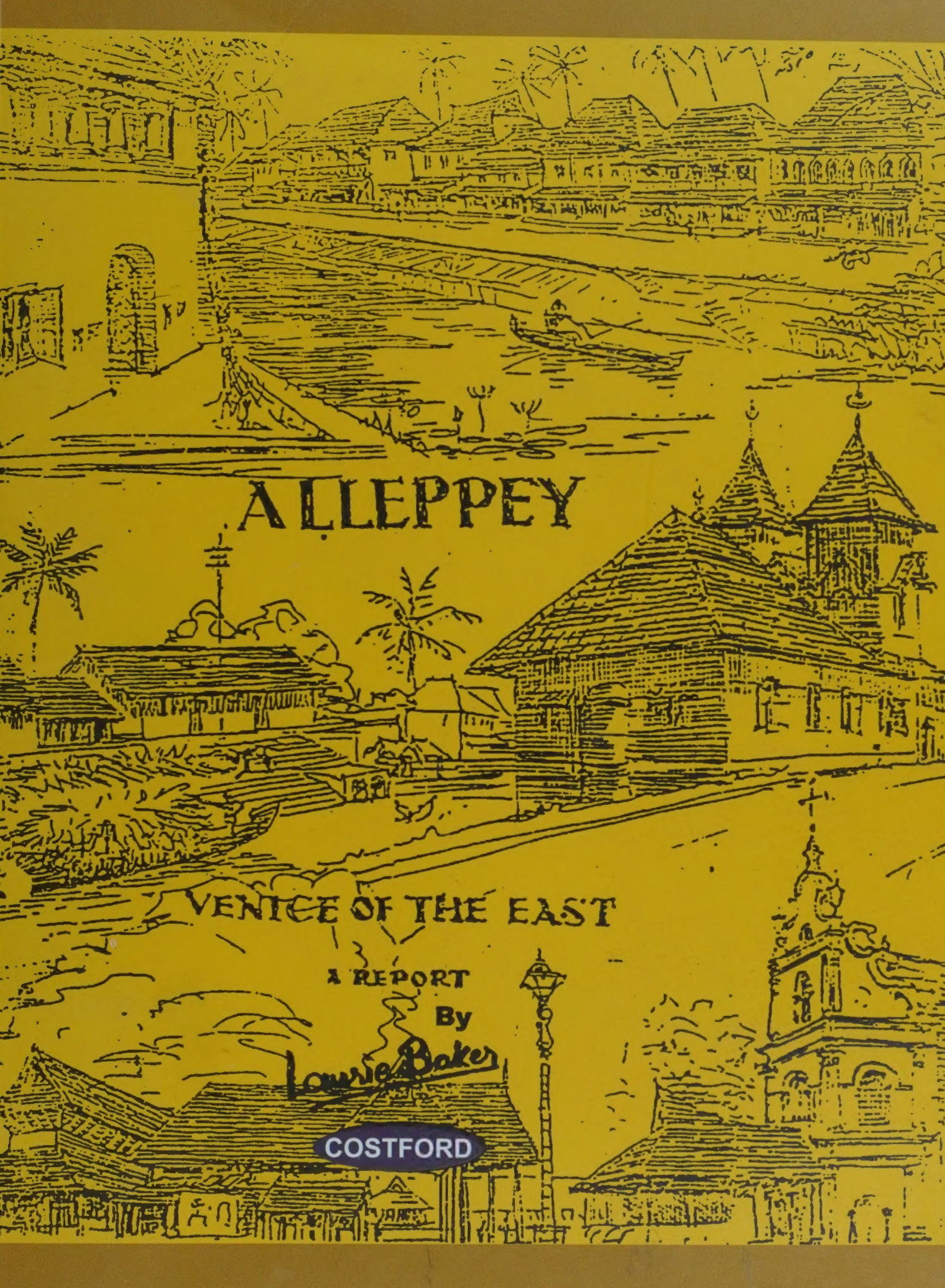
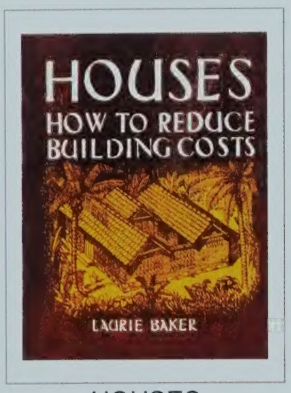

ALLEPPEY
VENICE OF THE EAST
A REPORT
By
Laurie Baker
COSTFORD

Other Titles in the Series



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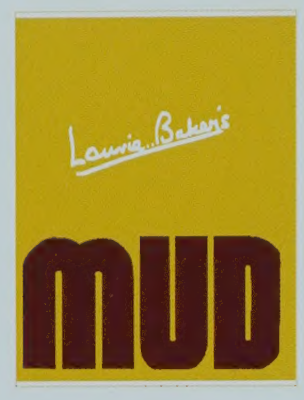

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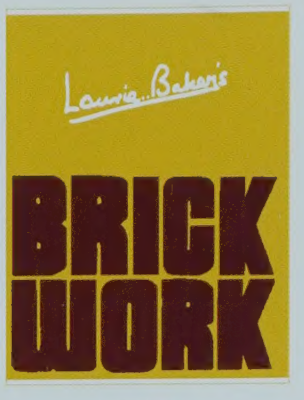

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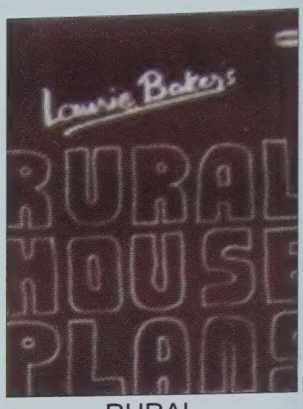

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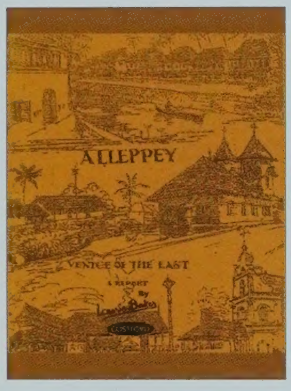

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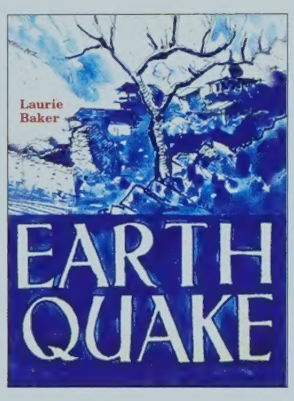

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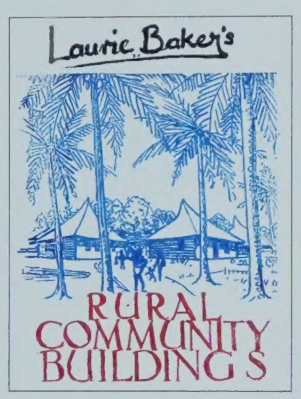

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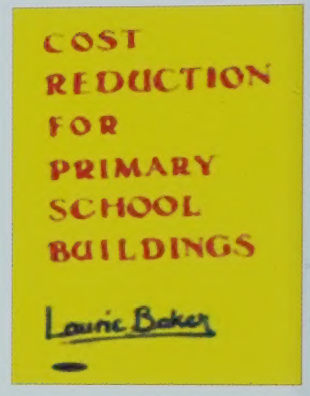

COST REDUCTION
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HOUSES
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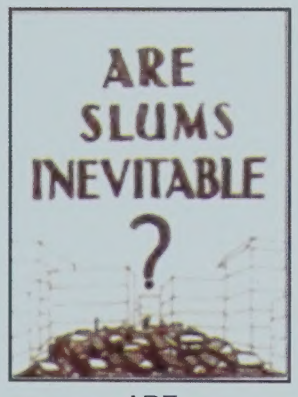

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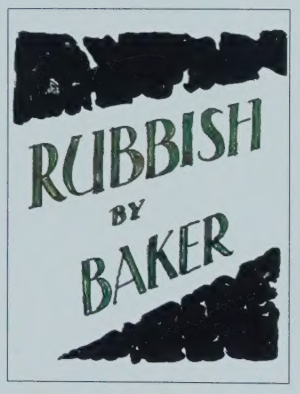

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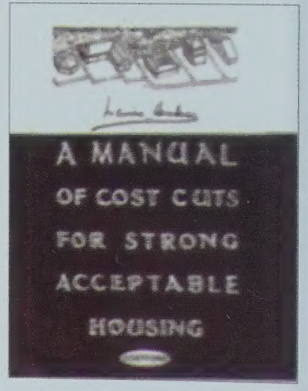

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For Pallavi!
Hope this will
inspire you to
come to Kerala
May 2018

ALLEPPEY
VENICE OF THE EAST

A Report

Dr. Laurie Baker

Published by

COSTFORD

Centre of Science and Technology
For Rural Development

COSTFORD

English

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A 1999 PREFACE

Nearly a decade ago a new Development Authority was aware that Allappy had been known all over the Tourist World as "The Venice of the East". They were also only too well aware that it had become dirty & neglected. The banks of the beautiful tree lined canals had become rubbish dumps.

My wife & I went there for a holiday and, as usual, my habit was to draw & sketch what I saw around me. Various people & friends, including officials, showed interest in these rough sketches and, for their information I added explanatory notes.

What upset me most was that in various parts of the world where I had seen architecturally famous places — local people had avoided Corrupting the old charm by not adding modern buildings & amenities. Often what had been the main central road of such a town or village was turned into a "pedestrians' only" area with trees & flower beds & seats etc. New Modern structures & new wide motor roads were built away from the old towns.

Much of Allappy was still 'pure' — except for the rubbish heaps — so I drew 'parallel' sketches to show how the intrusion of modern buildings would ruin the old charm. Alas! When I recently visited Allappy many of my imaginary horrors HAVE taken the place of the old beautiful architecture. Friends have asked me if they could publish my original notes & sketches so I gladly & hopefully give my Consent. Laurie Baker

A REPORT ABOUT ALLEPPEY -

This Report is being prepared because I have a longstanding affection for Alleppey. Because of an aunts knowledge of the place, before I went to school, 'Alleppey' was the only Indian town's name that I knew! I mention this to assure readers that this current interest is very deep rooted.

I am writing this because I would like to be helpful & try to put Alleppey in its rightful place as a noteworthy town of Kerala and of India.

I believe that we should look carefully and objectively at the current conditions & circumstances in Alleppey.

There are so many good positive assets but we must not shut an eye to its liabilities & defects and adversities ~~but~~ see how these can be remedied and added to the credit side.

I also believe that Alleppey is a very unique town. It has a unity, a complete-ness & a whole-ness that very few other towns have.

I ask you, therefore not to be upset if at times I appear to be over-critical or unkind.

My wife is a doctor & from her work I have come to accept the fact that treatments can sometimes be painful and drastic before a cure can be obtained.

I sincerely hope that the beauties of Alleppey (many of them are becoming tidier) and its people can be exposed and used to bring once more fame and prosperity and improved living conditions, not only for tourists, but for all who live & work in Alleppey.

ALLEPPEY ?
ALAPPUZHA ?
or അലപ്പുഴ

This report will, at times, deliberately use the
.e. ALLEPPEY. The urge to use the old
local names for our towns is understood
and appreciated. But the subject of TOURISM
will continually be cropping up in this report.

and in that context it is necessary to discuss the questions of identity AND communication.

It is frustrating & puzzling for domestic and foreign visitors & tourists not to be able to read or pronounce names, which may be common and easy for us. As one example, all English speaking people grew up to believe that the Southern-most tip of India is "Cape 'Cormorin'". It is true that we are puzzled to know how the British invented such a name, but, nevertheless Kanya Kumari is quite a mouthful

and has still not been assimilated into the ordinary tourist's list of place names. This happens in all countries — for example, all have heard of Munich, but locally it is called "München".

We also have to accept the fact that most languages of other people, both of India & of the world, do not include the letter ഴ. This, amazingly, in this English Script is written as ZH! ZH is certainly no clue to the proper pronunciation!

You need only to go to your next Railway station to see on the sign boards that even our Indian Railways are not able to write Alappuzha in Hindi or in pronounceable English!

Should we not consider, therefore either returning to the old ALLEPPEY? or always write both ALAPPUZHA AND ALLEPPEY?

As this report proposes to demonstrate that Alleppey is an ideal town & place to have a big prominent name on all tourist maps, the good old name for the previously world famous "Venice of the East" — ALLEPPEY should not be lost.

In any case, whatever is written on boards or books, all people who live in Alleppy will always continue among themselves to say അലപ്പി !

ALAPPUZHA'S INDUSTRIES

The first shock I have to record is that, officially, Alappuzha is 'Backward'! Please do not be offended. This does not mean that we are all illiterate, uncouth & uncouth. The term applies to the condition of our industries and our economy.

In fact when I first visited 'Alleppey' it was fifty years ago and it was probably the most 'thriving' Town on the Kerala west coast!

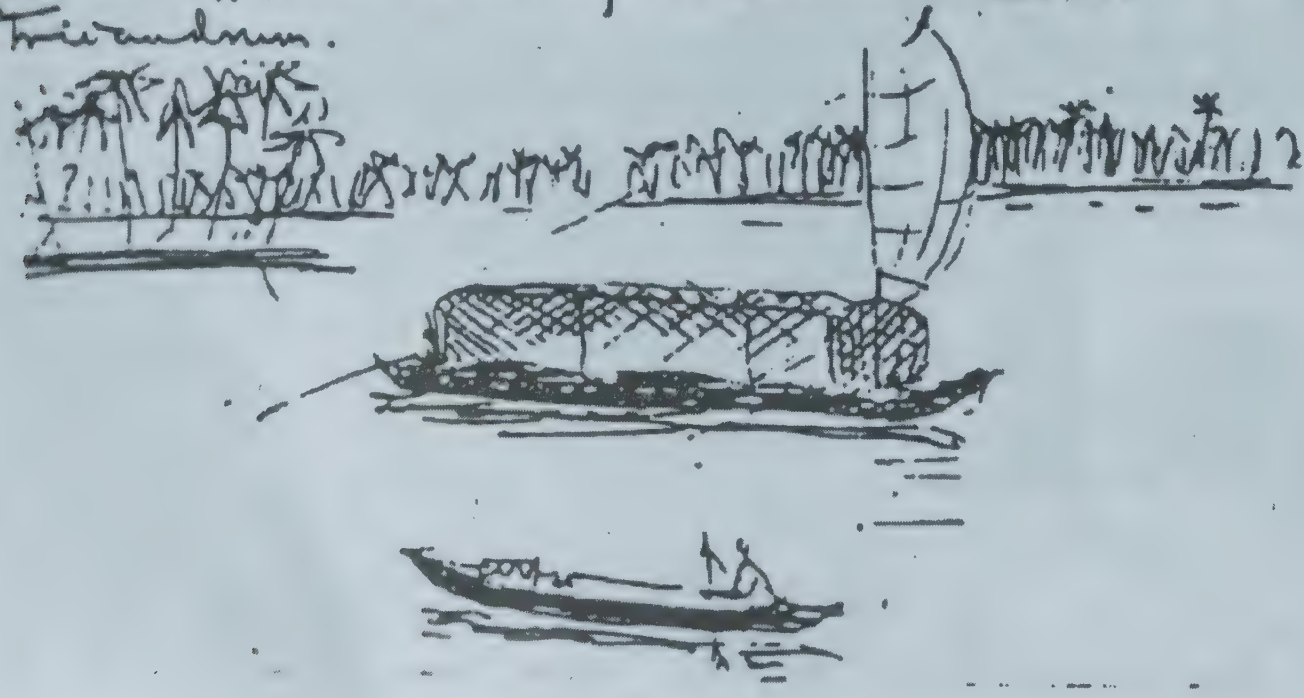
the old godowns for the 'Spice Trade'.

THE COIR INDUSTRY

Alleppey has long been famous for its Coir Industry. That this was a big flourishing industry is seen from the many large factories and Go. downs seen along the canal sides. Go in through the big front gates of these buildings & you find yourself in large courtyards ringed with offices & sheds & stores. Very little is now to be seen of coir in these fine old structures.

Twenty years back, many small scale Coir workers exhibited & sold coir mats along the road sides. Later, colourful dyes were also used for mats in varying bright colours & patterns.

A few years later not only mats were on sale — but proper 'pile' carpets. I was pleasantly impressed to find these wall-to-wall fitted carpets in the Officers' rooms of the Secretariat in Trivandrum.



But alas! In the following years Synthetic fibres & chemical dyes became popular and they seem to have remedied some of the defects of the coir carpets.

Coloured coir mats seemed to fade quickly. With usage, coir carpets 'spread'. Immediately inside doorways holes got worn thro' the matting & edges frayed. Somehow or other, people decided that dirt & dust fell thro the coir matting (The mats actually get the blame for poor housekeeping!).

So we find that coir mats & carpets have lost much of their popularity to HiTec products. Similarly even the much used coir ropes have been ousted from the market by 'nylon' ropes.

The most unfortunate part about all this is that there seems to be little or no prospect of any big 'come-back' for coir that served us so faithfully for hundreds of years.

THE LIME INDUSTRY

The beds, or floor of the backwaters are thick with shells which are brought in by boat & burned to make Lime. Allappey was famous for its excellent quality of lime.

All Kerala's old big famous buildings used lime for mortars & plasters. All the old Government & Religious buildings used lime. Cement was unknown & scorned. Now modern engineers & architects prefer & use only cement & have completely abandoned lime as a building Construction material.

As an architect & builder I feel very sad about this drastic change. For one thing — a commodity of which the country is extremely short — ENERGY, or FUEL — is used only in very very small quantities for the production of lime — whereas from the same basic material (shells & limestone) cement uses an enormous amount of fuel. (The cost difference therefore is also great.)

Another aspect is that whereas cement uses modern, hi-tec, sophisticated machinery and systems, whereas our methods of making lime have not changed in 5000 years!

But in any case, now it is too late to bring back lime as a major building material & all we do is spread it on betel leaves & eat it with our pan.

So, as with coir, only a miracle can revive the lime industry.

ALLEPPEY - THE PORT

For many hundreds of years Alleppey was known as an important, if small, port.

We still have the pier, the lighthouse, Godowns & offices, canals & boats for transport to and from the pier to the town & the backwaters.

But now most of the shipping trade has gone to Cochin & elsewhere & rarely is any use made of the facilities at Alleppey.

Alas! again! There seems very little prospect of any revival

Alleppey is, or was, one of the important terminals for loading and unloading of merchandise on the large extensive inland water freight transport system along the backwaters, running parallel to the sea coast and facilitating trade with the important & prosperous inland towns which thrived on such occupations as the Spice trade. My early memories of the backwaters was of many sailing boats going North & South as well as East to West, all from centrally situated Alleppey with its flourishing Sea port facilities too. Alleppey's famous Canals were specifically created to link the inland & the sea going systems of trade transport.

Now there is little evidence of this transport system on the backwaters (tho there is a move to revive it with work started on the National Waterway.— Still less evidence of seagoing transport — and overgrowth of water hyacinth together with a cessation of all water transport on the canals between sea & backwater.
But even with a National Waterway — what trade IS there for? All happy to use this N.W?

linked with water transport is the

BOAT BUILDING INDUSTRY

The few remaining ship building yards are now mainly only used for repair work.

PASSENGER FERRY BOATS.

There is an extensive passenger ferry boat service linking up towns & settlements on both sides of the back waters, together with long distance services such as between Cochin to Quilon (Kollam). All these services are well used, though, again — The new bridges on roads going from East to west (such as Changanacheny to Alleppay) have transfered a lot of users from boats to buses.

One cannot help wondering why there is that tragic, depressing or, if I may say so — Shameful Graveyard of about thirty Sunken passenger transport boats — (This is the first glimpse of our 'Backward' status) as one enters Alappuzha via the canal from the backwaters to the Bus & Boat Station.

FISHING

Where there is water there is usually fishing and processing: This is of course a local regular industry, but now mainly for our own local consumption. There ~~is~~ now no more and no less 'fishing industry at Alappay than at all the other towns and places bordering the Sea and the back waters.

With small attempts to ~~re~~ recreate the mangrove trees along the water edges there is the faint hope of Special fishing (shrimps etc) returning.

ANY NEW INDUSTRIES ?.

There is always the vague possibility of some new large factory or 'plant', especially in connection with Energy production, or slightly hush-hush plants connected with the coastal Rare Earths. etc.

Vaikom had its newsprint and Kayamkullam was/is hoping for Energy Production, But, for one thing Alappuzha does not have enough suitable available solid land for such big factories etc; and, for another, does Alleppey WANT the almost inevitable resulting pollution from these monster projects??

If we do opt for such possibilities, we can right now say Goodbye to Tourists & the trade & money they are supposed to bring with them!

ALAPPUZHA AND GEOPHYSICS

The survey of Alleppey's Industries has not been very encouraging. There is one more subject that has to be looked at fairly and squarely — that is the controversial subject of the so-called 'Green House Effect'. Many feel that it is merely another of these crazy wild ideas from scientists !

Most people & organisations, including the Government, tend to take the position of the ostrich who burys his head in the sand so that he can't see his enemies.

Even if there IS something in the Green House Effect theory, will it have any effect on Alleppey in our life time ?

Briefly the general idea is that the worst that will happen will be a rise of a few feet or so of the sea level all over the world. Some Scientists believe it is already happening. For some time now there is a controversy raging over the rise of water in the sea & canals of the Venice of the West! Is the water rising? or is the land sinking? Which ever it is, the canals are now deeper than they used to be.

One prediction is that in the next sixty years the main sea level will rise one, to one and a half metres.

If this did come about it would mean the submerging of much of our coastal areas. Places like Lakshwadeep will almost disappear! More than half of Kerala's coastal towns — Trivandrum, Cochin, Koyhikode etc — will be affected. Almost all of the sewage disposal farms are now at sea level!

Alarmist or not, it is unwise to ignore this subject while we are thinking about the future planning for the revival of Alleppey.

SUMMARY OF THE PRESENT SITUATION

1. Alleppey is listed as a Sea Port. As such it is almost dead & is unlikely to revive.

2. Alleppey was a Backwater Ferry Boat terminus of central importance, but the Ferry Boat Graveyard indicates its present unpromising condition. It may continue, but not grow.

3 Alleppey was an important & well known Lime producing centre. Very few people now use Lime & it is unlikely that the industry will revive.

4. Alleppey was one of the biggest and best known Coir Industry Centres. Coir products are no longer in favour and there is little likelihood of any revival.

5. There are no really big industrial centres, factories or plants, nor are there likely to be any. If they DID materialise they would probably be more of a curse than a blessing.

6 Alleppey is known to foreign tourists but on arrival they find 'facilities & amenities' extremely poor & inadequate. They make little or no economic impact on the Town & its inhabitants.

ONLY THE LAST ITEM ON THE LIST HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BE DEVELOPED SUCCESSFULLY AND PROFITABLY.

VENICE OF THE WEST IS ONE OF THE WORLD'S GREAT TOURIST CENTRES.

WHY IS ALLEPPEY, VENICE OF THE EAST, NOT ?

THE REMAINDER OF THIS REPORT TRIES TO SHOW WHY AND HOW IT IS POSSIBLE TO REGAIN IT'S IMPORTANCE

ALLEPPEY'S TOURIST POTENTIAL IS ENORMOUS.

Almost everything the average tourist looks for — Alleppey has it:-

SUN SAND & SEA.

PLUS

1. The famous & still beautiful canals.
2. Almost all buildings near the canals are beautiful, distinctive, unspoiled Good architecture ('tatty' but repairable!)
3. A very distinctive boat design
4. A rich crop of mosques churches and temples.
5. Plenty of interesting History.
6. Beautiful scenery everywhere.
7. Full of fine beautiful trees - fruit, flowering, & the famous beautifully massive Rain Trees.
8. A comparatively quiet noiseless place. Not many loudspeakers, & little traffic.
9. No rush, No stress, no hustle or bustle.

What should we do to make proper use of all these wonderful 'plus points' — plus points not only for tourists but for all who live in & near Alappuzha?

It is important to keep in mind, all the time — that there is no other Town in the whole of Kerala, or indeed of any coastal town in India, that is so well endowed as Alleppey.

Others may have most of the plus points previously enlisted — but many are ruined by so called 'Development' or by the invasion of so-called 'modern' buildings & structures & 'devices'.

People have no option but to endure this half-baked modernism almost everywhere they go. Alleppey can still show what it was like in "the Good Old Days"

Improvements & Up grading of facilities etc ARE needed. We must see that these are made but in an unobtrusive and beautiful way which is in harmony with the 'Cultural' Heritage which is still so visible in Alleppey.

But there is no time to lose.
We MUST ACT QUICKLY.

VENICE OF THE WEST

Alleppey used to be called by many people the Venice of the East. Visiting the two Venices it takes no time & little imagination to see where the similarities lie — even though one is a great royal city & the other a small rather sleepy town.

CANALS

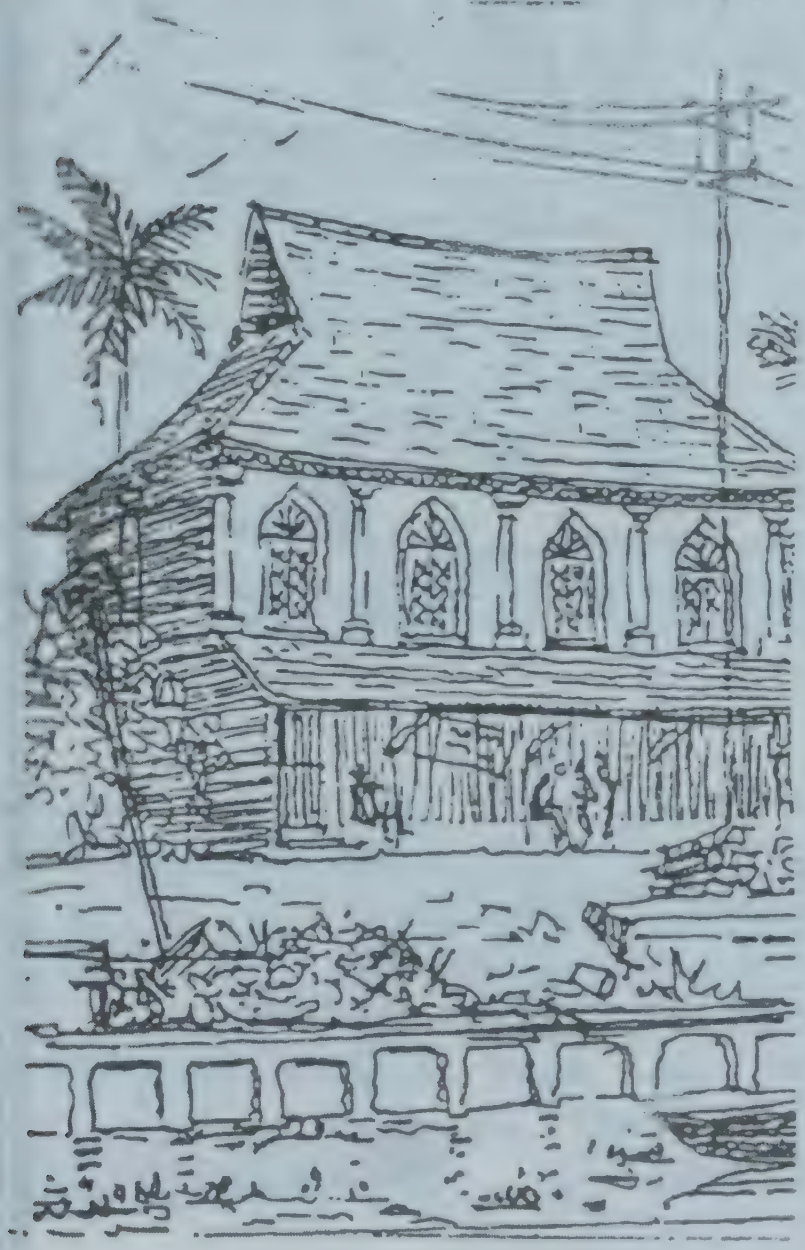
Both towns have a network of canals running through the main part of the town. These were not built for decoration but to use instead of roads.

Visitors to Venice wanting to see the place & its treasures don't take a taxi — they take a gondola and are poled at a leisurely pace along the canals. To see buildings & people.

We could do the same thing on Alleppeys beautiful canals.

VENICE OF THE EAST

FINE OLD BUILDINGS. The second similarity between the two Venices is that the canals are lined with fine old buildings of charm & character, full of historic interest. All the buildings are of different ages and styles — in both towns there is a strong unity & cohesion that is rarely felt in 'modern' cities & towns. Alleppey does not have so many old Palaces & buildings — but even tho they are smaller & humbler they are varied & have a great charm, with a distinctive unity that makes a special Canal-side architecture, not to be found anywhere in India in the larger & more well known tourist towns (Goa, Srinagar, Pondicherry etc.).

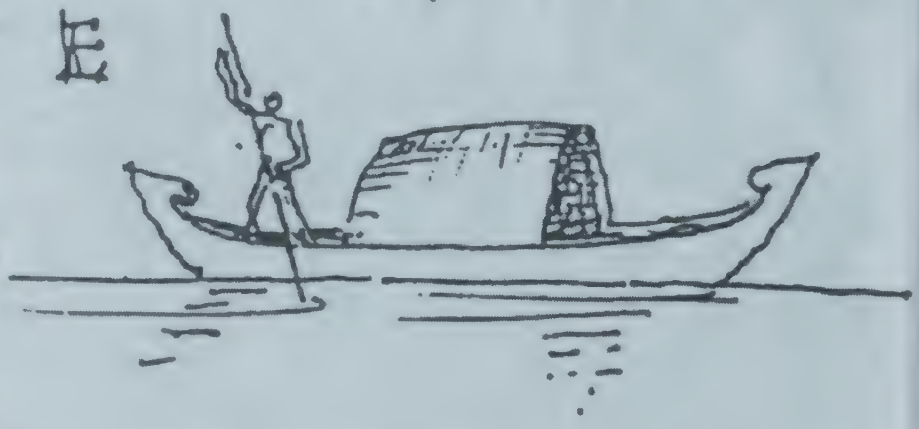


These two sketches show the similarity of a 'romantic' style & the proximity to the way-side Canal waters.

DISTINCTIVE BOATS

Third. Venice of the West has a distinctive passenger boat called a Gondola. As can be seen from the sketches below — it bears a striking similarity to Alleppey's canal boats.

Being poled slowly along Venices canals is one of the main tourist attractions. No one would visit Venice without a trip on a Gondola — Besides the boatman who poles you along there is often also a musician playing on a stringed instrument....

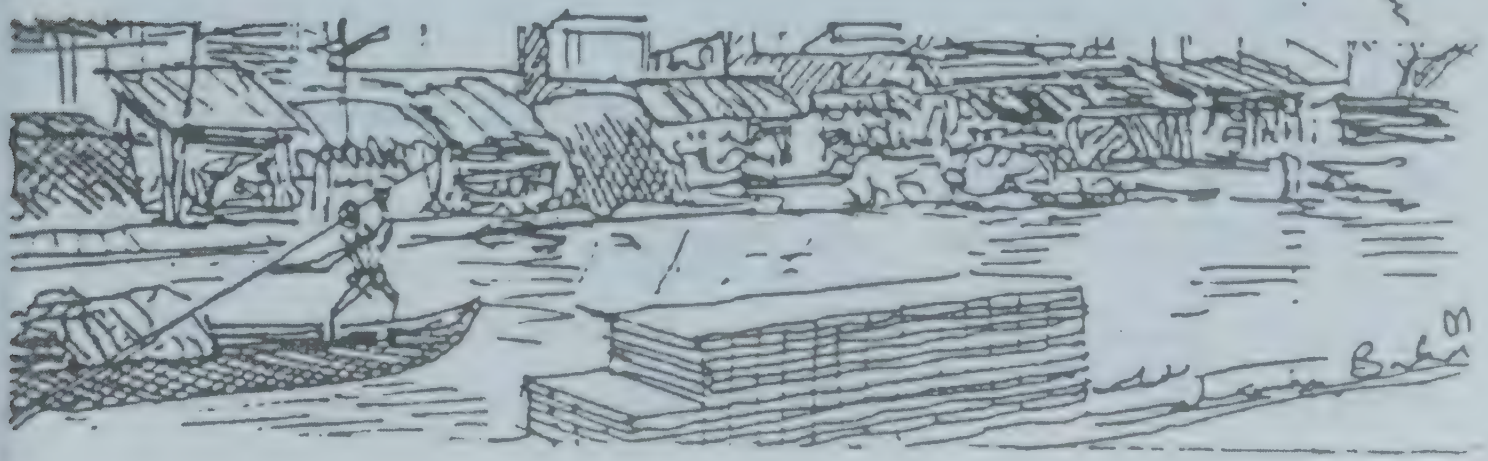


There are very few people who do not enjoy this slow restful peaceful noiseless form of travel. We <u>have</u> the boats (& they can still be made) All that is needed to make them a 'tourist attraction' is to change the straight hard wooden plank in the middle for a comfortable, upholstered, bee-cushioned seat & we can easily compete with the Venice of the West & make an Alleppey canal boat ride a Tourist MUST! !

CANAL-SIDE BANKS.

On the side is a sketch of the canal side in the Venice of the West. →
Below is a sketch of the canal-side at Alleppey bus station, the Venice of the East.
You can see the similarities — the water, the boats, the buildings.
In Venice the canal side pedestrian way is for people to stroll along & to sit under a coloured umbrella for a rest, to watch the passing scene & to have a refreshing drink & a chat with friends.

In Alleppy — right outside the bus station — the visitors first view of the famous canals is a canal bank cluttered with shacks & rubbish piles & dumps, posters of all shapes & sizes, heaps of building materials and no where to sit. In fact the canal side is so cluttered in such an untidy dirty way that the new visitor is not aware that there IS a canal.



In Venice
You can relax
& have a
refreshing
drink on the
canal side
like this →

In Alleppey
You can get
a glass of tea
from a shack
on it canal
side like this →
there are no
seats to sit on
and there is
a pile of smelly
fly blown
rubbish, also on
the canal side . . .

Venice makes full use of its canal sides —
all for the benefit & enjoyment of its own
inhabitants & its tourists.

Apart from the trees above, in many parts of
Alleppey it is difficult to find the hidden beauty.

It can be pointed out that these differences occur, even though there are so many similarities, simply because of the way in which people regard their surroundings — their environment. Do they look after, & be proud of their own property, the property of others, common property belonging to the Government?

The Beauty seen by visitors & tourists depends upon whether the local people look after, enjoy, and are proud of what surrounds them & what they have inherited from the past.

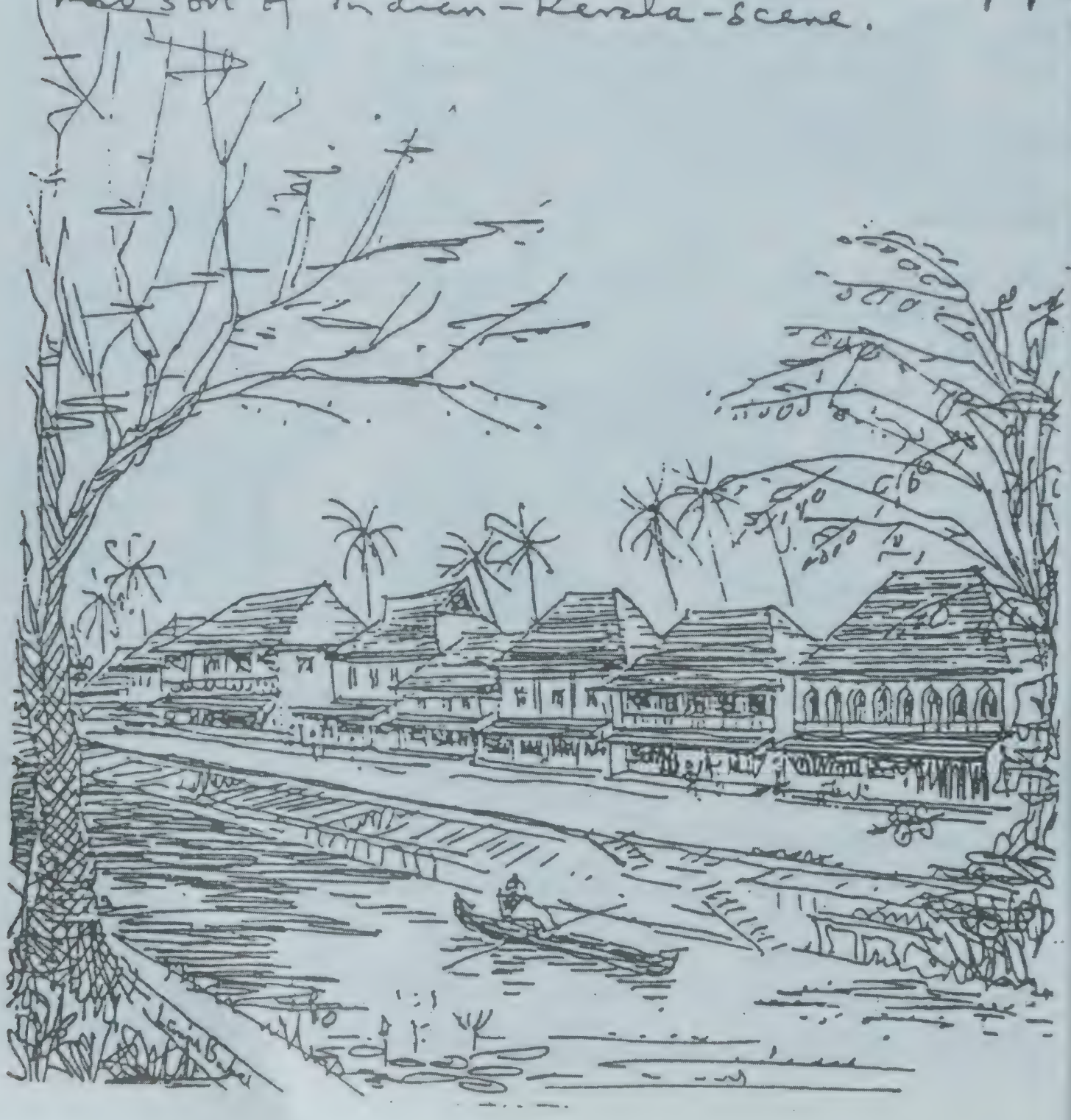
Do we really want visitors to see all our dirty rubbish?

It is not the Government who throw down — anywhere — their waste paper, fruit peel, bottles, rags, tin cans & ashes. It is we ourselves who do these things & it is high time we learn that we cannot expect others to love India as long as we behave in this untidy, dirty way.

Note An on-the-spot sketch in Allepey.

CANAL-SIDE BUILDINGS.

The Canal sides of Alleppey have many unspoiled stretches with delightful buildings like these shown below. People come from half way round the world to see & photograph this sort of Indian-Kerala-scene.



But alas, we all too often regard such buildings as old fashioned & useless! We in Kerala seem to have little regard & no love for our 'Cultural Heritage'.

Below I have repeated the sketch opposite, but here cut down a tree, demolished one of the old buildings & in its place put up a five storey "Modern" block of building - totally out of character with the Alleppey style!. The Authorities have also put up a row of modern light poles and 'tubes'.

If we want to revive the life of Alleppey thro tourism this is the sort of thing we MUST NOT DO.

Even the Go-downs and warehouses along the canal-side roads are Good, first class architecture! Most are of excellent proportions, often with fine detailing in columns & arches.

Many,— even most, of these buildings are no longer in use or are lying idle but they are Good strong structures & can well be put to other uses. One or two, for example, are currently used as Marriage Halls, others converted into offices.

These humbler buildings are never-the-less full of old local character — a delight to the eye- and are very much a part of the old "Venice of the East"!

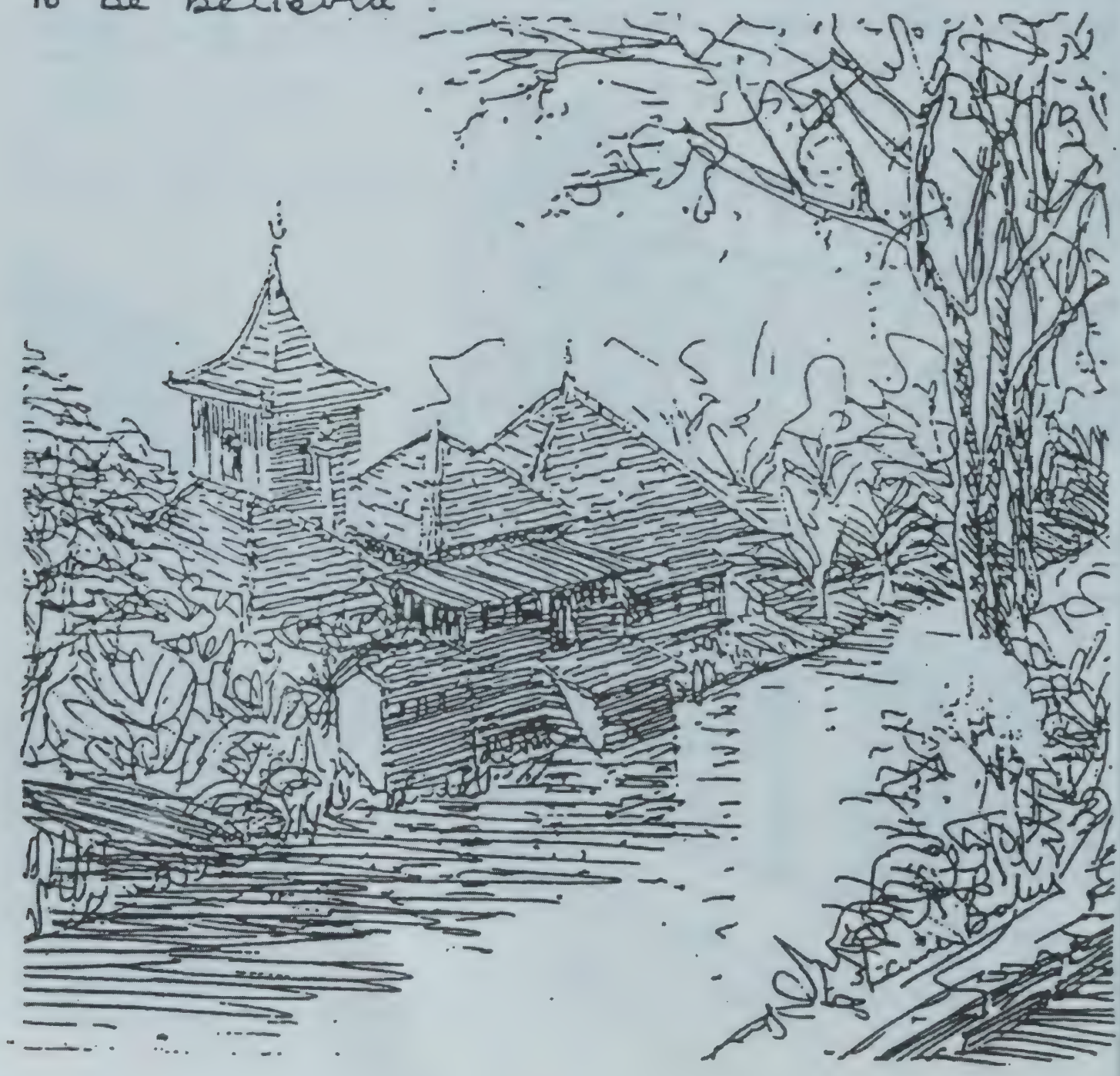
It all has charm & attraction To tourists & all.

Below, again, I have replaced one of the old buildings (only in the sketch - not for real !!) to show how the same stretch of "Charm" would be destroyed the minute a new, currently fashionable type of 'useful' building is inserted.

We must learn — & quickly - that our kerala buildings are <u>NOT</u> old fashioned junk — But realise their beauty & the fact that they are steeped in legend & history. They all form part of the character which is essentially <u>ALLEPPEY</u>

CANAL SIDE RELIGIOUS BLDGS.

Visitors from outside are often amazed to find in Kerala the visible demonstration of the fact that there are people of various religious faiths living, working & worshipping, peacefully, side by side. At this period in history this is something that has to be seen to be believed!



A trip along the old canals of Alleppey takes you past the beautiful Kerala architecture of buildings of the three main faiths in the town.

Where else in the World can you see mosques — masjids — like these shown in these two sketches of canal-side Alleppey?

Here is the entrance to a masjid—
right on the manmad canal-side roads.

The mosque on the opposite page appears
to be growing right out of the canal
waters.

Nothing alien, nothing imported—pure Kerala!

Not many people came along this stretch of road — but those who were obviously visitors to Kerala all had their Camera's clicking away at such beauty.

The views from boats on the canal are doubly delightful because of the reflections.

All of these buildings are an enormous unique asset to Allappey.

Christian churches, Too are found along, & near to the canals. Some are entirely local in their architectural style while others blend western baroque with pure Kerala style!

Many foreign visitors & tourists have to be reminded that Christianity had come to India, thro' the coastal towns of Kerala, long before it penetrated their own European countries. Again — we dont realise the fact that many tourists come for far more than fun & pleasure. This visual feast of religious cultures can be shown them in Alleppey

Another canal-side, simple, dignified, old church with well kept grounds.

In its churchyard there are many very old tombs, beautifully kept.
Inscriptions reveal a lot of 'small history' & side lights on the British civil & military officers who lived & died here in Aleppo in the eighteenth century.

Also close to the canals are the superb absolutely magnificent Kerala Hindu temples.

This mainly carved wooden architecture with its dominating tile roofs is without parallel in the world.

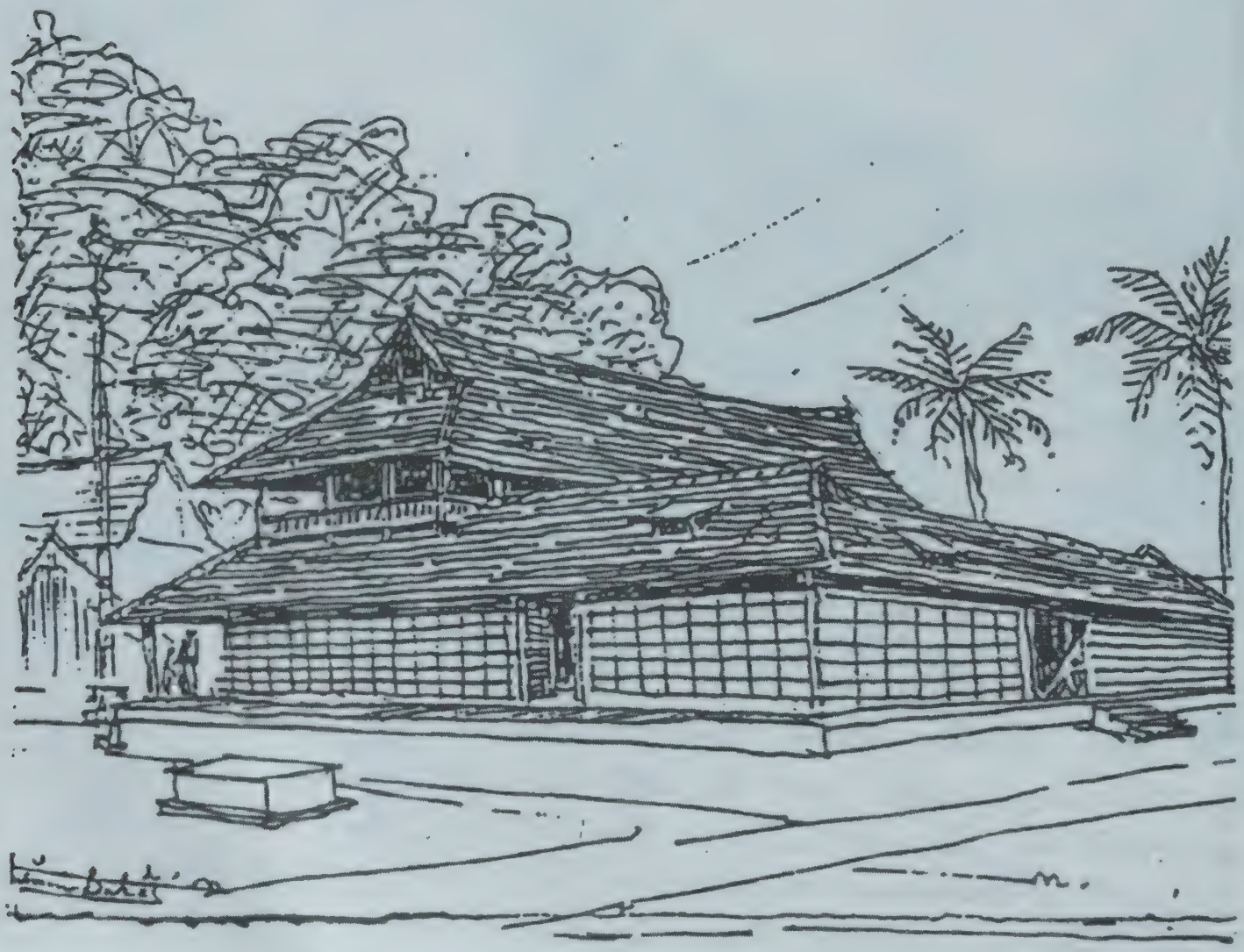
The precincts are wide and open, dotted with huge trees & small, but no less beautiful subsidiary buildings.

All too often wide open spaces for special religious Gatherings are not so attractive when they are empty & deserted. But not so here! The Quiet, peace & serenity are palpable. No other town in India can show such feeling & beauty.

No!— this sketch has <u>not</u> been done in Japan! 96 is another typical bit of Kerala Temple architecture — near the canal in Alleppey.

Once tourists are aware that they can see all these oriental wonders in a simple quiet beautiful place like Alleppey — they will <u>NOT</u> waste their money going a few thousand miles further on to Japan.

But we must remember that Alleppey cannot rely <u>only</u> on these wonders built by our



forefathers. We have to provide all the other amenities & facilities for having a comfortable place to stay, good clean food to eat, not to mention comfortable attractive enjoyable transport facilities.

People will take photographs, not only of temples & mosques but of ordinary (for Kerala) houses like these shown above. How a tourist would love to stay in such a building overlooking the canal!

THE BUS STATION

If you arrive by bus & walk over to get an auto or a taxi — you will catch a glimpse of the canal as you look back at the Bus Station. The architectural styles visible have absolutely nothing in common with Kerala's famous architecture. What you now see on one side are non-descript "modern" characterless buildings, and on the canal-side crude huts & shacks & a lot of ugly posters, & light poles leaning at all angles. There are also piles of rubbish lining the canal edges. This is your first impression of Venice of the East!

If we want to regain this title, we can remedy the ugliness & remove the unsightliness. A Kerala Roof over the main Station building could provide a shady resting & waiting space with a fine view over the town. Instead of shacks we can replace them with Kerala style, clean, Kiosks with umbrellas & seats overlooking the water. Posters can be hung under Kerala shades & information can be obtained. With something like this, instead of the scene opposite, you will really feel you have arrived in the Venice of the East

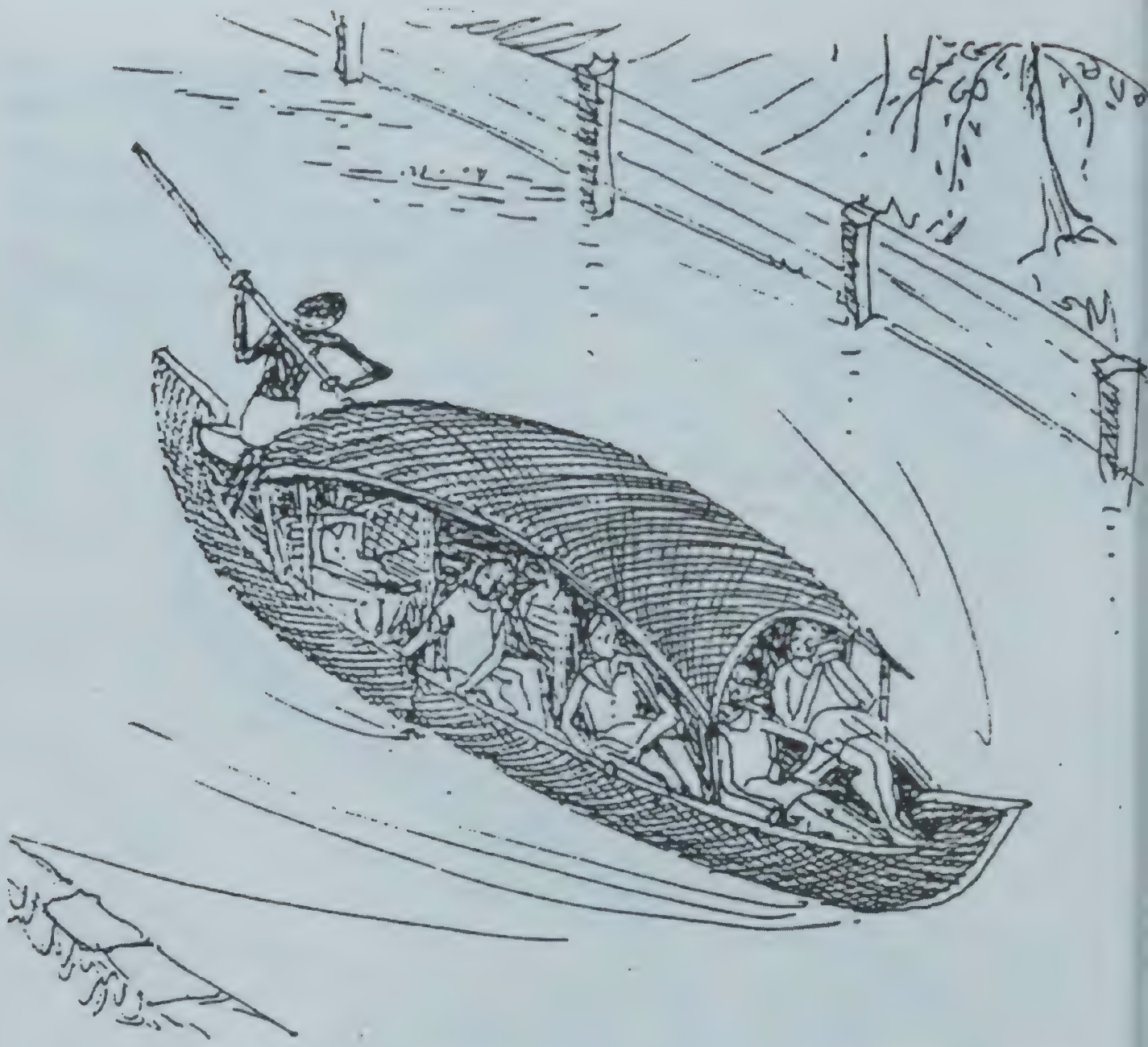
CANAL BOATS

It will be a pleasure to look at our cleaned-up canals — but it will be even better to go on them. At present there are only various types of rather uncomfortable country craft or the big ferry 'bus' boats. But sightseers would like something more comfortable. Or if you want to get to another part of the town quickly — then we need the Kerala style boat-equivalent of an Auto!

Maybe something like this →?

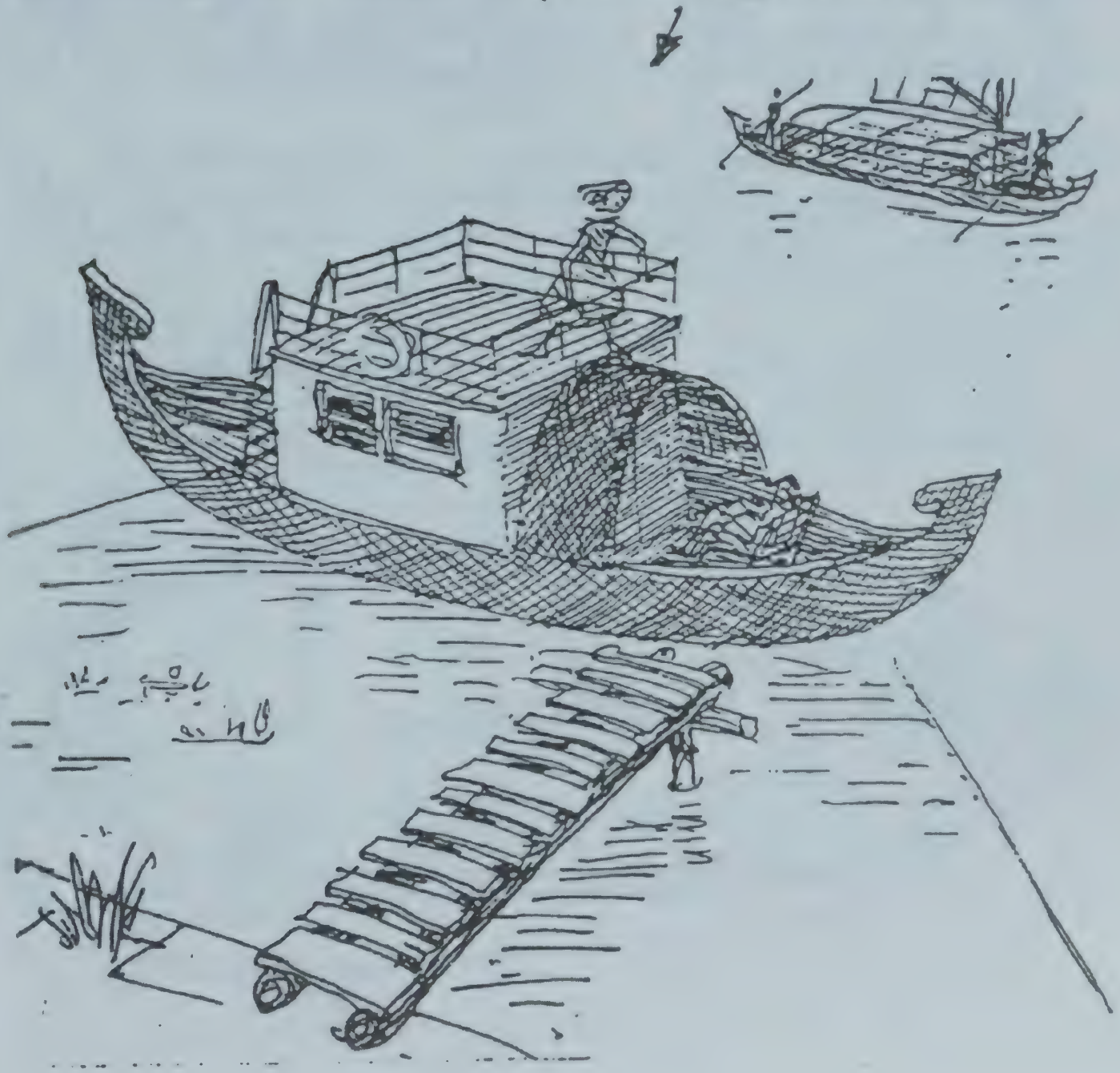
Tourists are Not in a hurry. They would rather Cruise slowly Thro' the canals, seeing the sights along the banks, slowing down to take photographs, stopping here & there to drink tender coconuts, or to step onto the banks to stretch their legs & look over an old temple or church. The traditional poling the boat, rather than using an engine will also appear to be preferable to all.

Why not something like the boat shown above?



Often domestic tourists (every bit as important as foreign ones) travel in groups or families. They too are not in a hurry & have come to see the sights of Alleppey & to try the local food & drink coconut water. So why not a larger version of the previous boat that will comfortably seat from six to twelve people? Hire one for the day & get to know the Venice of the East from its canals!

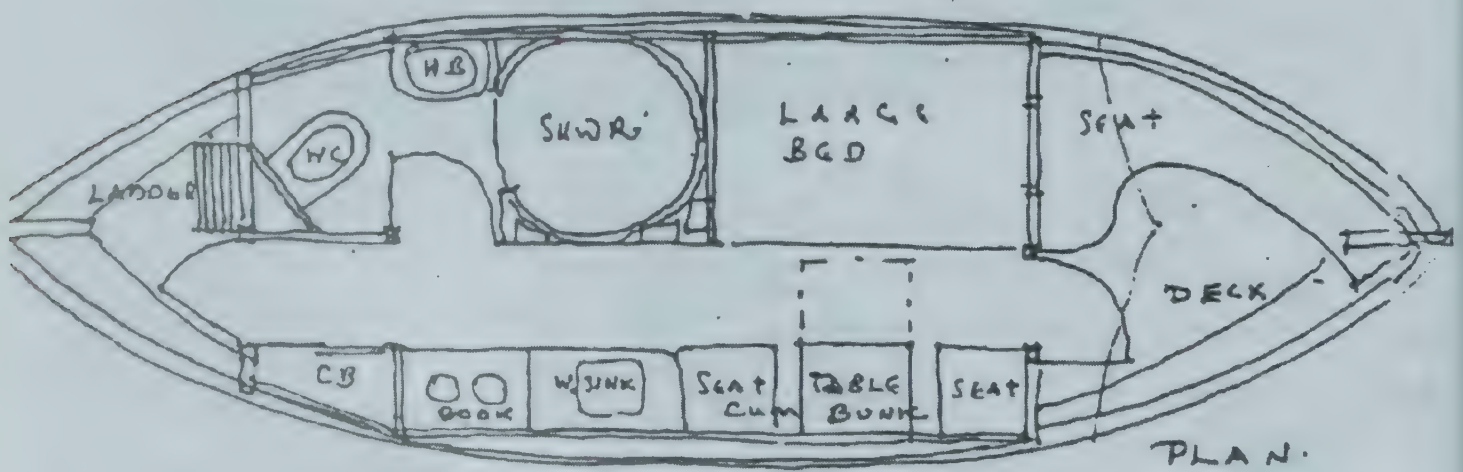
In Kashmir, the Houseboat has always been a major attraction to visitors. Regretfully, now a visit to Kashmir is not so attractive. But Alleppey's backwaters & quiet canals could very conveniently & happily have houseboats of various sizes. They need not be the large houseboats of Kashmir but we can develop our own variety, in true Kerala style. A small one could be something like this....



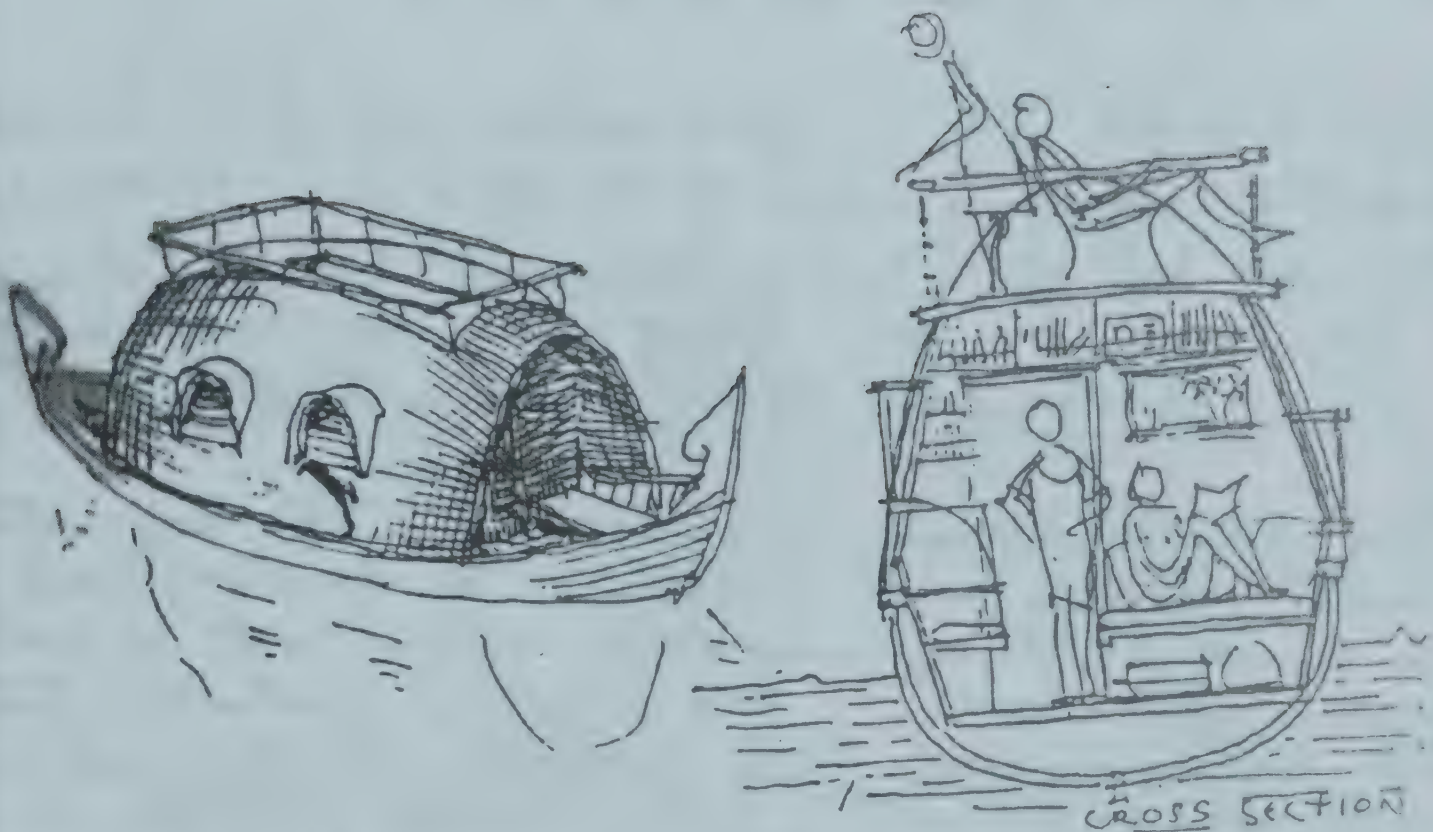
There is one big snag about house-boating. There must be, nearby, or on board, an supply of clean water and, similarly, There has to be food-proof sanitation. We cannot allow the railway system of letting wastes drop through a hole in the floor! There has to be a System like that used in a plane, and this, for success, depends on a regular and efficient removal AND disposal System. This is quite possible, but it is an extra cost to add to the basic cost of the boat and its fittings.

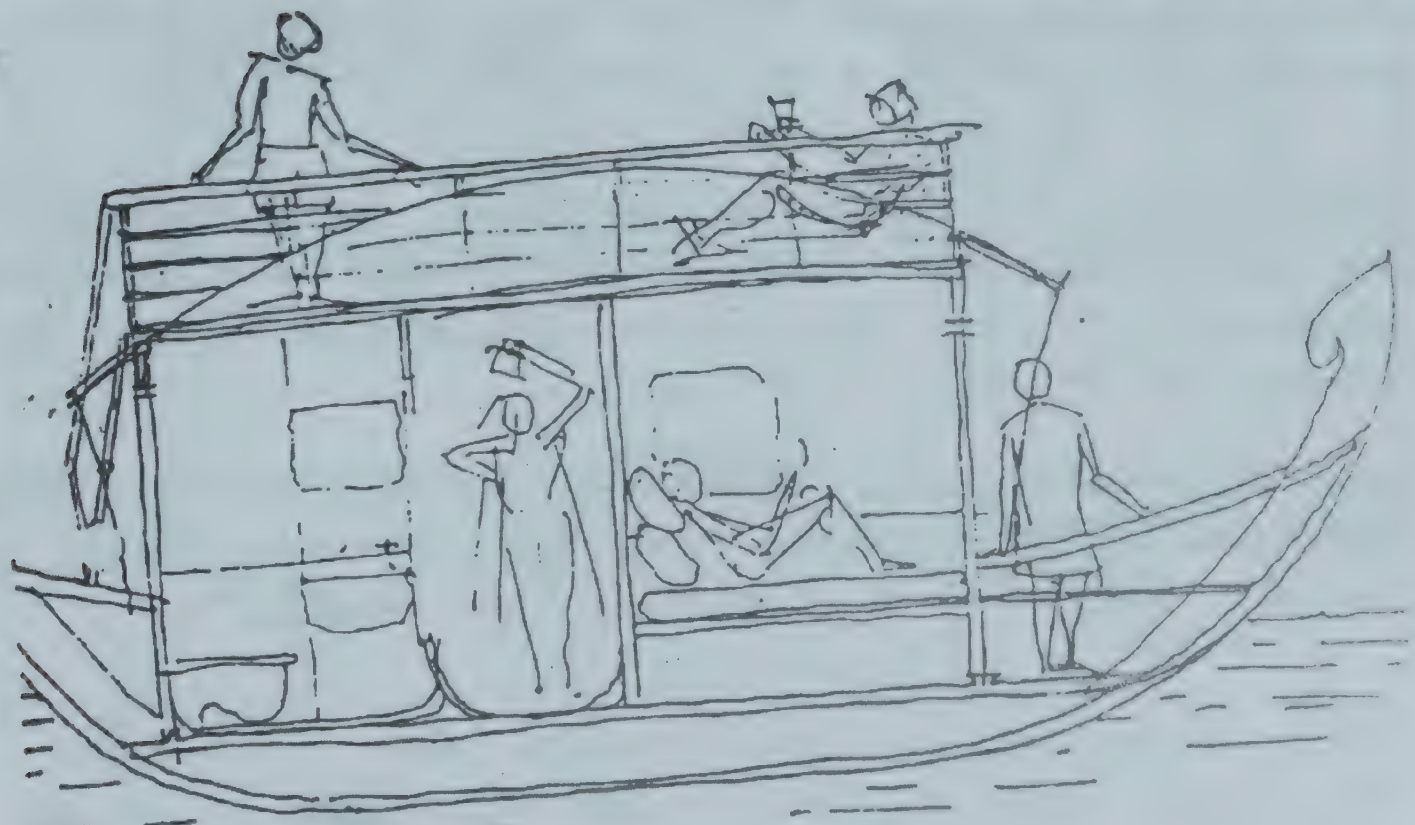
Boats are a most attractive alternative to lodges and hotels. Shepperey is ideally and uniquely suited for such a major tourist attraction.

These drawings give an idea of the sort of accommodation in a middle sized houseboat which could be moored either in the backwaters or along the canal sides.



PLAN.


CROSS SECTION


LONG SECTION

A HOUSE BARGE

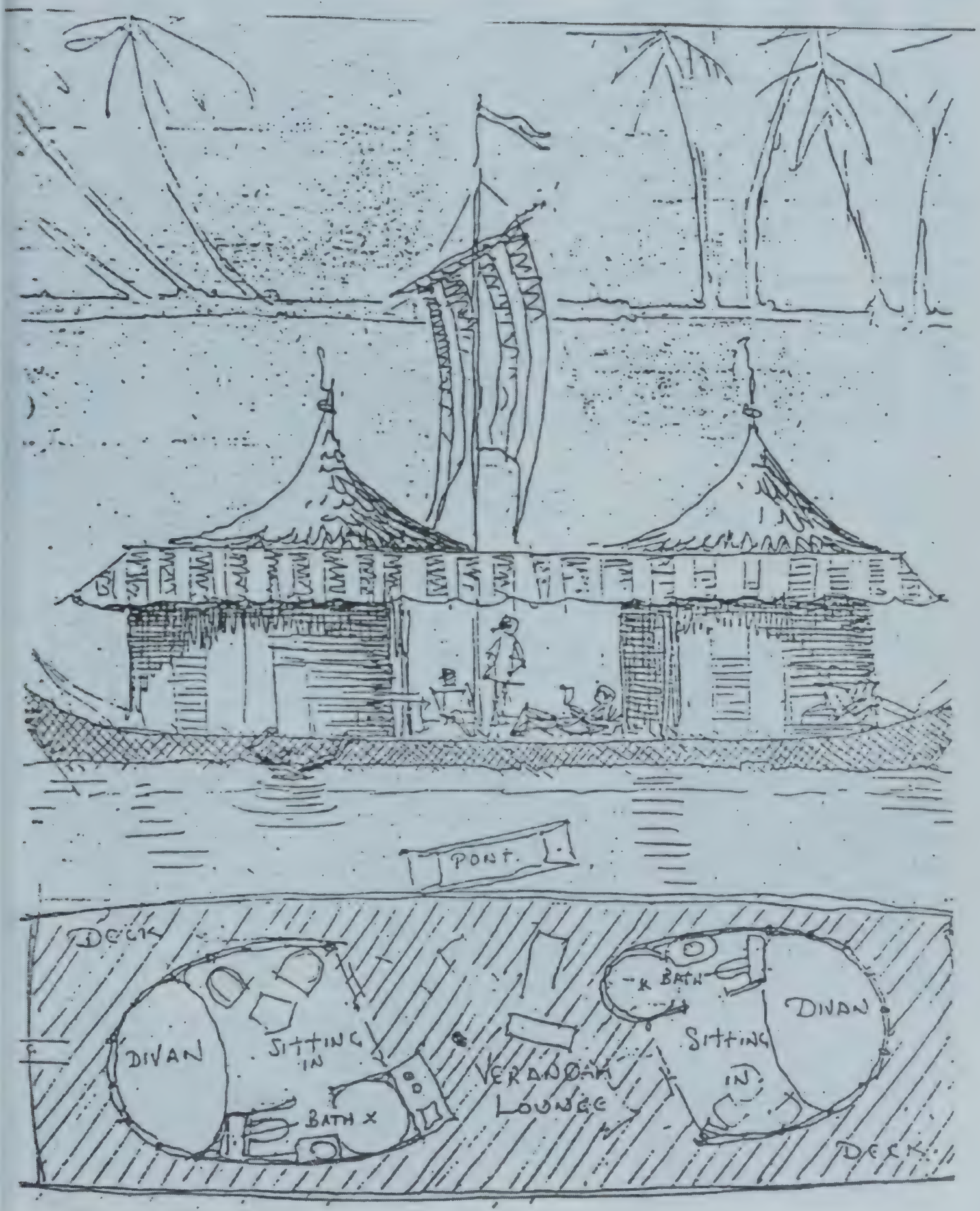
This could be a variation of the house boat — something new, but not out of place, to Kerala. It can be a flat bottomed barge of any size and on its deck can be any sort of particularly desired accommodation

This sketch-plan shows one with two separate 'huts'. Each hut contains a diwan/bed in a small sitting-cum-bed room with a bath-room attached. The space between the two huts is also roofed over to provide a breezy sit-out. A kitchenette can also be provided and there is a small punt for people to get to and from the shore.

Similar Barges can also be fitted up as a restaurant, a shop-cum-beauty parlour, a games-cum-library & reading room. & so on.

In this way the Utility barges, together with a few House barges, can form a small floating colony or hotel.

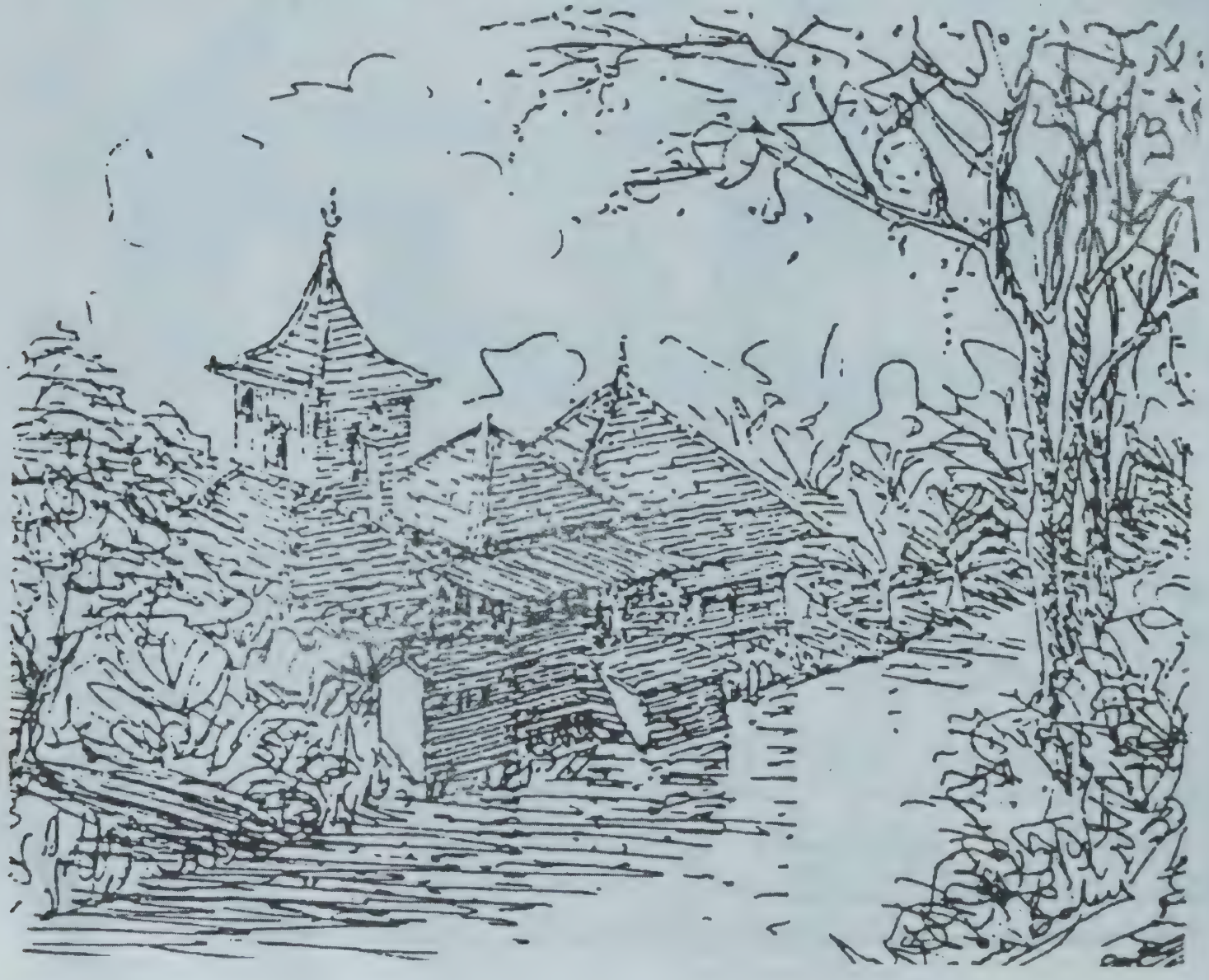
This sort of engine-less lagoon-craft has the very big advantage that it can be towed or poled from one place to another and no engine is required — hence eliminating noise & pollution.

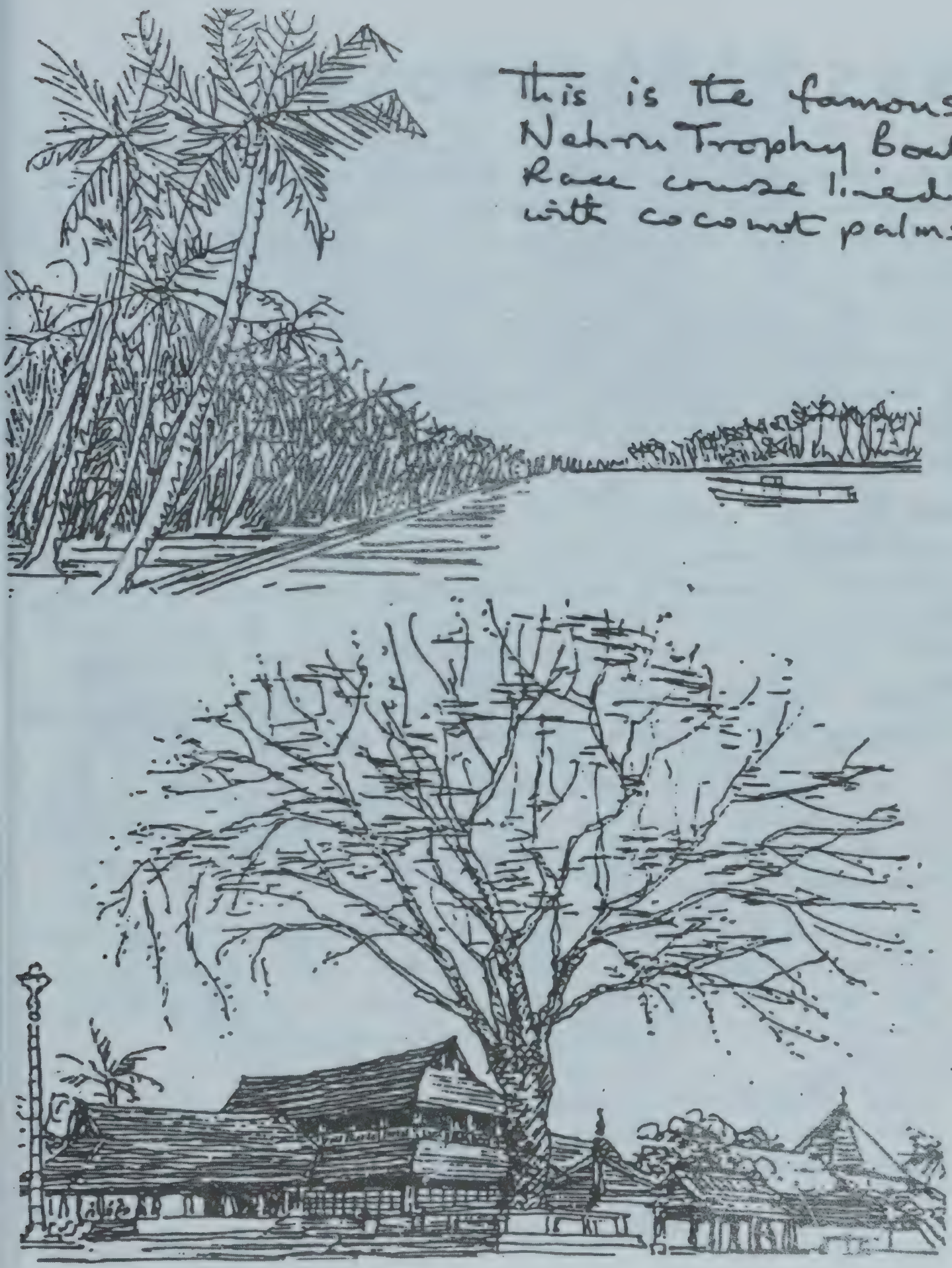

PONT.
DECK
DIVAN
SITTING IN
BATH
VERANDAH LOUNGE
BATH
DIVAN
SITTING IN
DECK

TREES

Allapuzha is extremely fortunate in still having a lot of very large beautiful trees of many varieties. The enormous shady Rain Trees are particularly attractive. Obviously trees provide shade from the hot sun & in this case it makes it possible to walk during the day time along the canal-sides without suffering from excessive heat.

Trees need constant care & vigilant protection. People should not be allowed to mutilate them or cut them down. They should be controlled & provided by the citizens themselves & they must see it as an essential asset for their own well-being & for promoting Tourism.





This is the famous Nehru Trophy Boat Race course lined with coconut palms

WASTE DISPOSAL

Waste Paper Containers etc are all very well but they are useless unless there is an efficient and regular system of emptying them, Taking the waste matter away, & disposing of it properly & not just dumping it in another place.

First of all the Collection System. It is not necessary (& neither is it possible) to have expensive-to-buy & expensive-to-run lorries. The sketch opposite shows what usually happens. It seems to be an expensive re-distribution scheme! (E.R.S.).

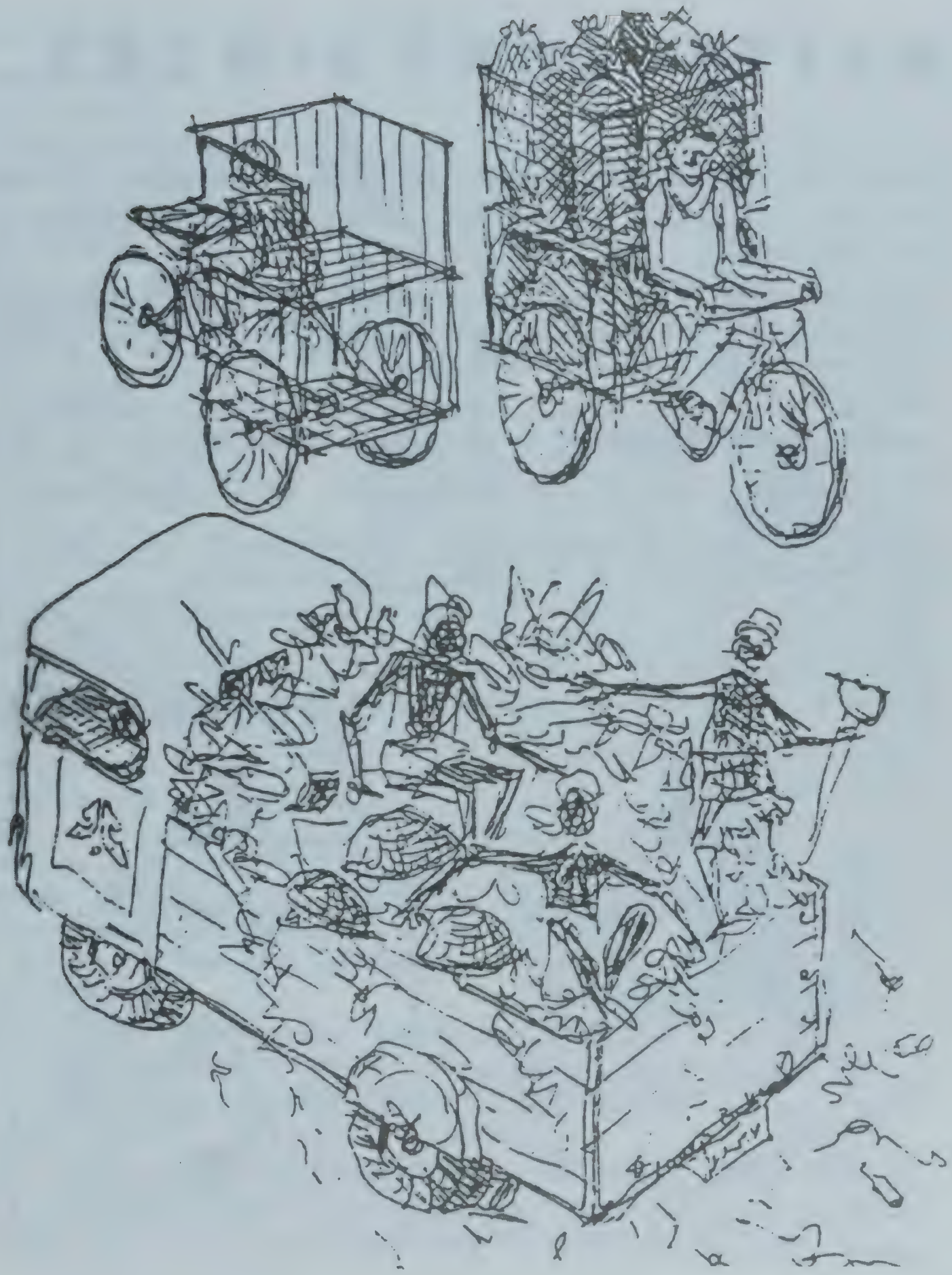
As far as possible the various types of waste matter (paper, plastic, glass, metal, organic stuff) should if possible be collected separately. (Plastic bags of different colours works well if people will discipline themselves to use these bags properly.

These can then be collected on bicycles fitted with appropriate racks to hold the bags.

In old towns, & Alleppey is no exception, often houses can only be reached down narrow paths & alleys. A lorry cannot go down them, but bicycles can.

You can buy more than 200 bicycles for the cost of one lorry, & the running costs are almost nil. The lorry breaks up road surfaces, the cycle doesn't. There is no noise pollution from a cycle.

Some of the old unused go-downs & warehouses can be used for sorting & recycling wastes. Cloth & paper can make new paper. Metals can be melted down & re-used. So can glass. Flame are used for plastic. Recycling wastes CAN be Big Business.



WASTE CONTAINERS.

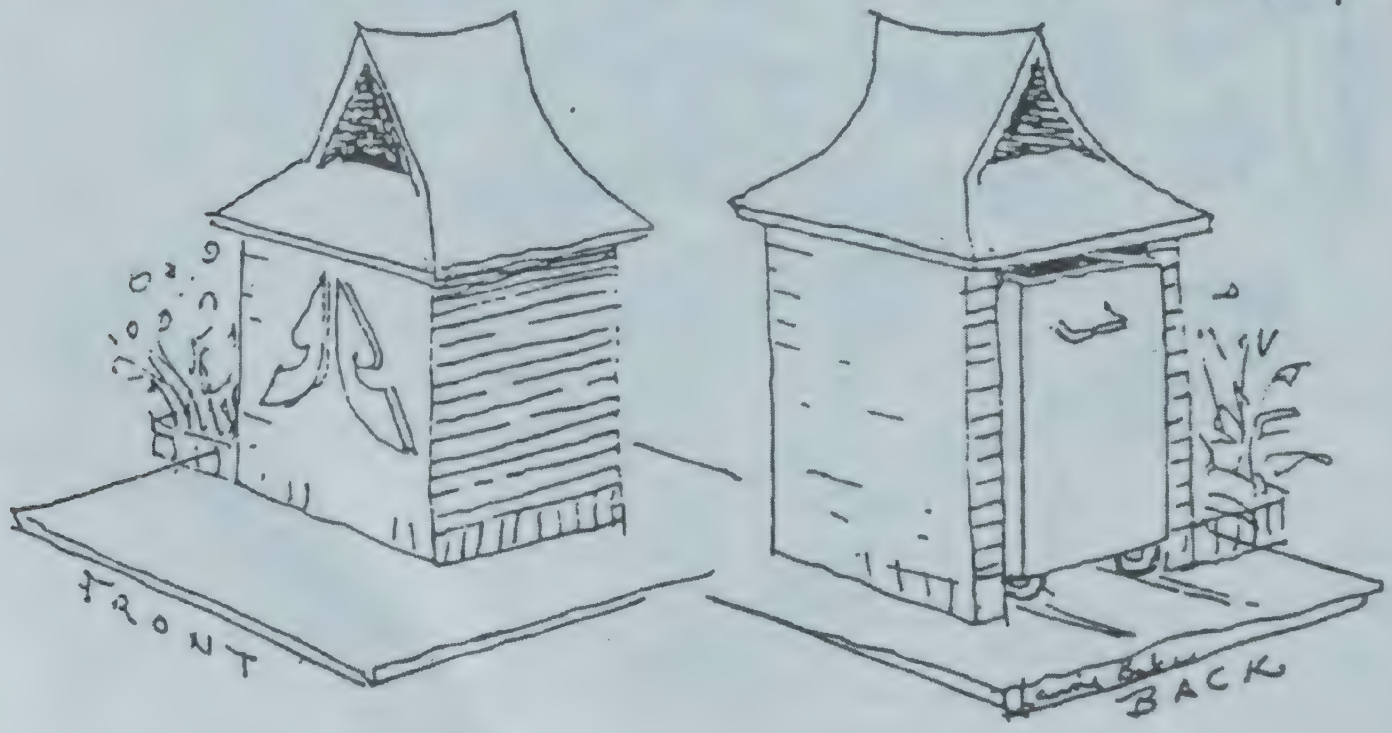
Along the canal side roads (& other roads too) there should be waste bins or containers — as foolproof as possible.

Obviously the containers must not look repulsive or dirty. It should be easy to put in dirty, unwanted, waste material.

The Containers must be distinctive so that people know what it is & dont have to hunt for it.

It should have a removable inner container.

Below is one suggestion. The unit has a rear wall with a Kerala style roof. The wall can carry the Development Authority's logo. There can also be a small well kept flower bed. There is a metal or plastic inner container on wheels which can be pulled out for regular emptying.



Sometimes waste paper is in such large quantities that it blocks the entrance hole of containers & prevents other material from being put into the inner Container.

From the pollution point of view it is not so favourable, but unless there is a paper recycling centre

INCINERATERS

can be an answer to paper disposable problems. However, they too must not be an eyesore & They must work efficiently & smoke must be carried away at a suitable height above Ground level.

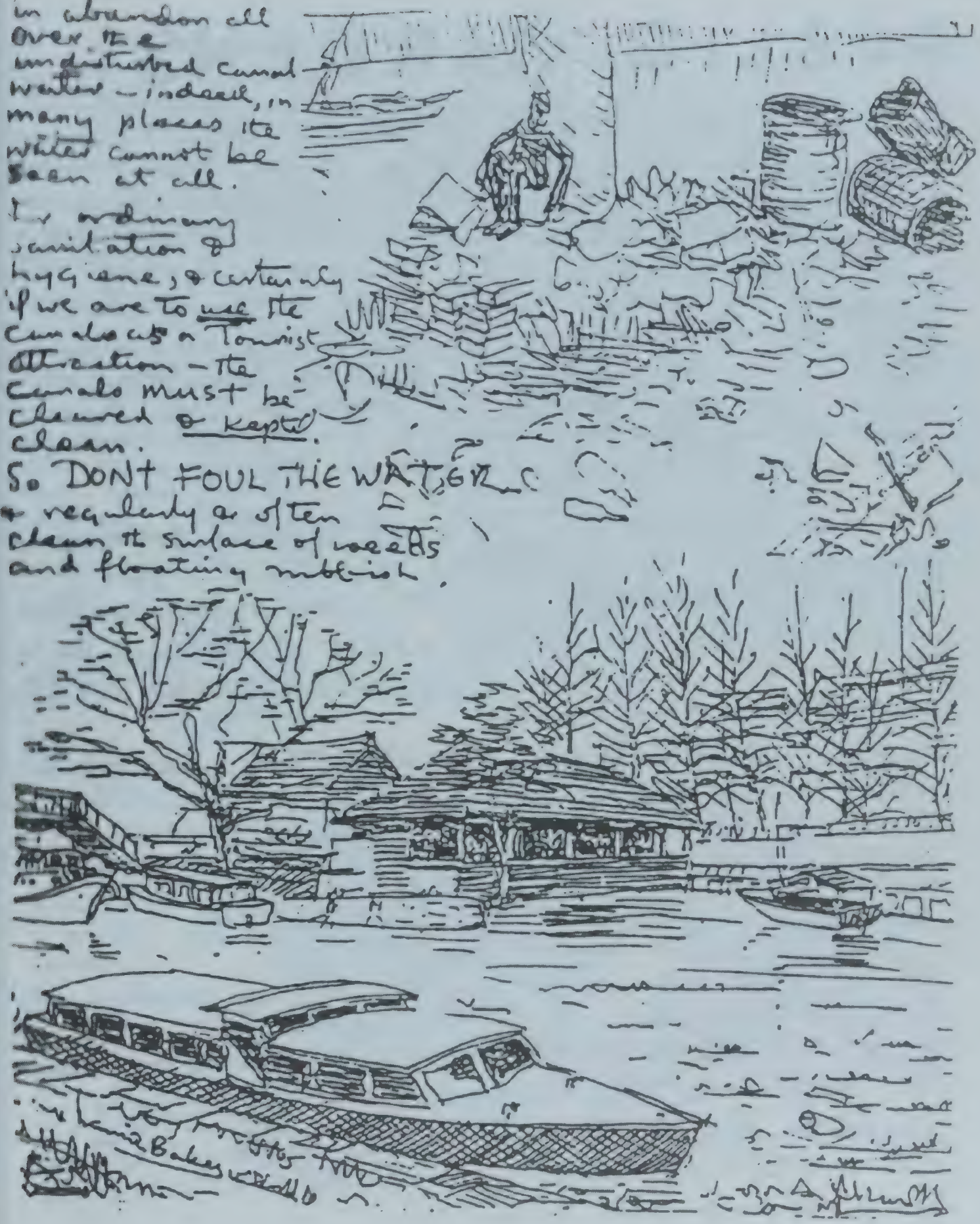
The Incinerator also has to be Visited, emptied of ash or 'congestion', REGULARLY, by the organisation that attends to the waste Containers.

It must be continually emphasised that 90% of the problem is caused by peoples thoughtless, careless dirty habits of just throwing what they don't want on the floor.

DIRTY CANALS

Again, it is we ourselves who help considerably to foul the canals. Rubbish of all sorts is either dumped on to the sides of the canals & gets pushed in, or it is thrown straight into the water. Even an 'abatoire' — a meat slaughtering place lets all the blood & waste bits go into the canal!

Nature also helps the pollution of the canal by all the masses of Water hyacinth & other weeds growing


in abundance all
over the
undisturbed canal
water – indeed, in
many places the
water cannot be
seen at all.
In ordinary
sanitation &
hygiene, & certainly
if we are to use the
canals as a Tourist
attraction – the
canals must be
cleaned & kept
clean.
So DONT FOUL THE WATER
& regularly & often
clean the surface of weeds
and floating rubbish

PUBLIC GARDENS

Our Gandhi Parks have become a regular feature of nearly every town in India & of course they have their valuable place in Congested polluted areas. Unfortunately they are almost always the same — very formal, straight squared paths, set little flower beds, & of course a Statue in the middle. They certainly are not a feature that tourists come half way round the world to see. At best — they are a breathing place — the lungs of big cities & should remain there.

As can be seen from sketches on previous pages, there are already plenty of open spaces in Alleppy — and more openness than usual because of the network of canals. The formal Gandhi & Nehru parks are also already in existance.

People usually go & sit & relax in a park & they want to see around them — people-flowers trees — & anything of a historical nature such as old buildings & ruins. It is also an added bonus if they can see the sea — or, as in Alleppey, the canals.

What they cannot do, however, in or along the Alleppey canals is to sit down in the shade & watch the beauty around them & to see the boats going to & fro on the water.

Children, too, have to be catered for — they are not content to sit & relax — they want to play, jump, climb and so on!

So all we need to do is to clear spaces - preferably under trees — & simple but beautiful seats can be put round the trunk of a tree like this →

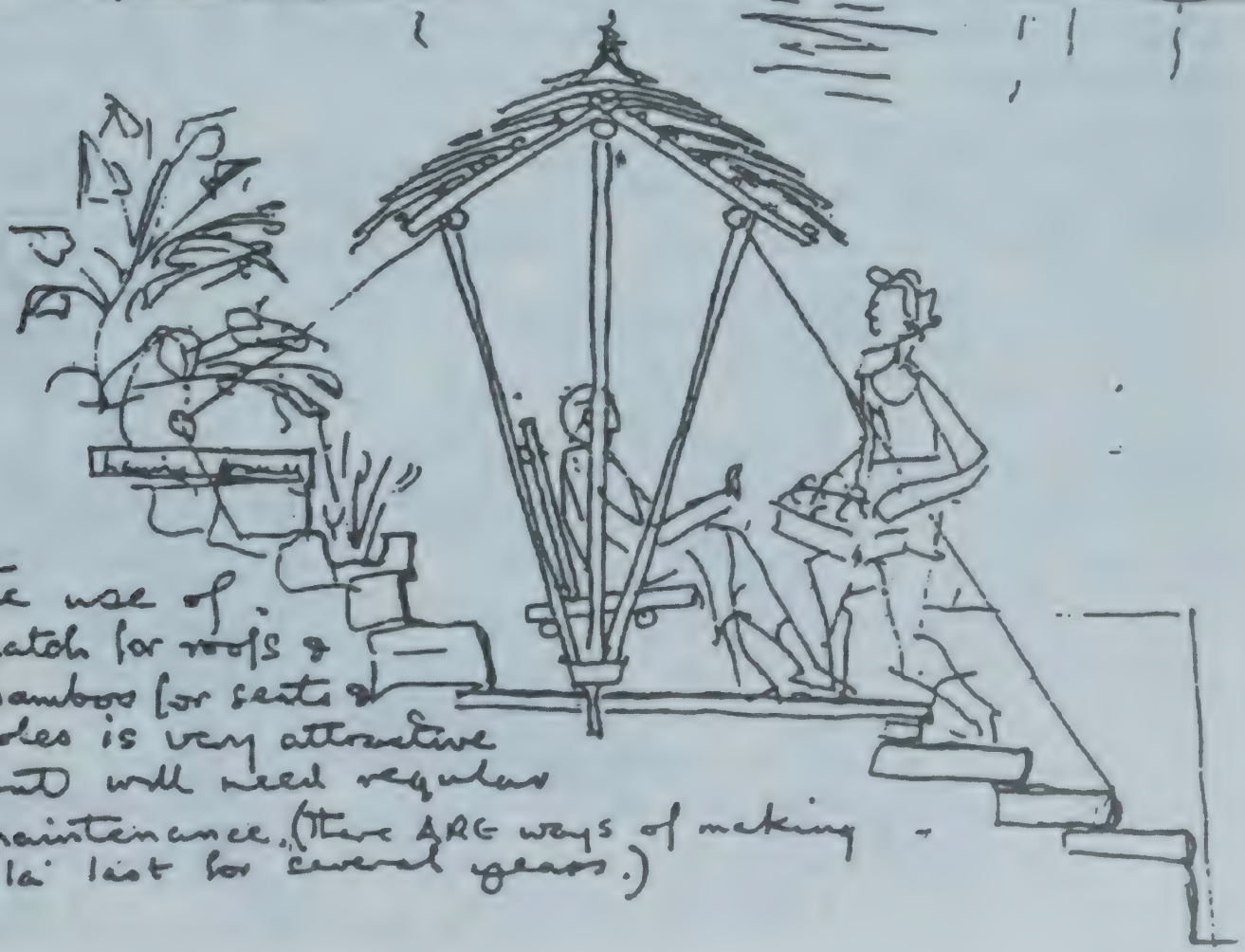
Or a small area can be paved with "round slices" of an old tree trunk and used, also as seats in this manner →

Nothing must be 'stereotyped' — there must be ingenious variety.

Plants can be added for delight & for a little screen for privacy.

Not far away across the backwaters near Changanur there is plenty of split granite stone which makes admirable 'eco friendly' unusual, strong seats.

As usual — upkeep & maintenance & keeping each little mini-garden clean & tidy is of utmost importance. Once a year on Gandhi Jayanti is NOT enough. These small projects can be taken up by individuals, business firms, Banks, Schools, Religious groups & so on. The Money needed is little — but the following love & care is essential.



The use of thatch for roofs & Bamboo for seats & poles is very attractive but will need regular maintenance. (There ARE ways of making 'cla' last for several years.)

CHILDRENS SMALL PLAY AREAS.

These also can be along the canal sides, with suitable rails to prevent falling into the canal!

Small adjoining play areas can be provided for children. Big stones in a sand bed, as above, are easy & inexpensive to build and maintain.

Similarly, big old tree trunks are also easy to place on sand. The sand allows for tumbles and falls, also sand itself is a good 'toy'!

There is no need for the usual elaborate & expensive slides & swings & roundabouts. These simple play devices of stone & wood are easy to acquire & maintain and they are in keeping with the surroundings of trees & canal sides with beautiful views over the water. Where appropriate, swings can hang from the tree branches — simple ones for children & the 'swinging settee' type for adults!

It is very important to understand that all these suggestions are to improve the environment of Alappuzha — FOR the inhabitants themselves & their children. If all these things are good & clean and beautiful for you — then they are good for tourists also. We must <u>not</u> encourage double standards. People come here to see India — especially the people of India — how they live, how they dress, how they play, what they eat. It is a very mistaken notion that they come for speed boats & Disneylands! Those who come from America & Europe & Japan have all these modern buildings & artificial entertainments. It is because they want something new, something different, something exotic, that they spend large sums of money to travel to places like India. I know this because I too was once a foreigner. The beauty & the places like Alleppey were so great that I have stayed here for 50 years.

DRINKING WATER

At times, Alappuzha can be very hot, also very windy. Visitors long for a glass of pure, cold, clean water!

: an absolute MUST for foreign tourists anyway. They have a feat of getting dysentery and "tummy upsets"

This can be seen from the fact that so many of them pay up to Rs 20/- for a bottle of so-called 'mineral water'.

They are also frightened of 'coloured drinks' & even bottled drinks of the Coca Cola type because they do not believe pure water is used.

So why not give ourselves good pure clean drinking water — & improve our own health — and the tourists can have it too?

There must be storage towers & filtering & purifying units too. It is probably more economical to have such small units attached to each tower. Short pipe lines can lead to Kiosks.

The Town Authorities would do well to provide along the canalsides attractive, Kerala-style kiosks & booths which can be rented out. Safe clean cold drinks can be bought & shady comfortable seats can be provided — or the kiosks should be set up in conjunction with our mini Canal-side gardens

Even more attractive (AND healthy) will be the sale of 'tender coconut water. Coconut is plentifully grown locally & is always available. Clean utensils (knives to cut open the shell — straws, or clean glasses) must also be available — & they must be <u>Seen</u> to be clean.

SNACKS

Also need to be always available and, again, the Kiosk must look attractive AND BE CLEAN.

MAKE SURE that trash & rubbish bins are available right near-by — not 50 yards away! And be sure that rubbish (& its inevitable swarms of flies) doesn't lie around on the ground.

Fruit, particularly exotic fruit like mangos & guavas & our many varieties of bananas, must be fresh & clean & kept where they do not attract flies, & those little 'eye-flies'.

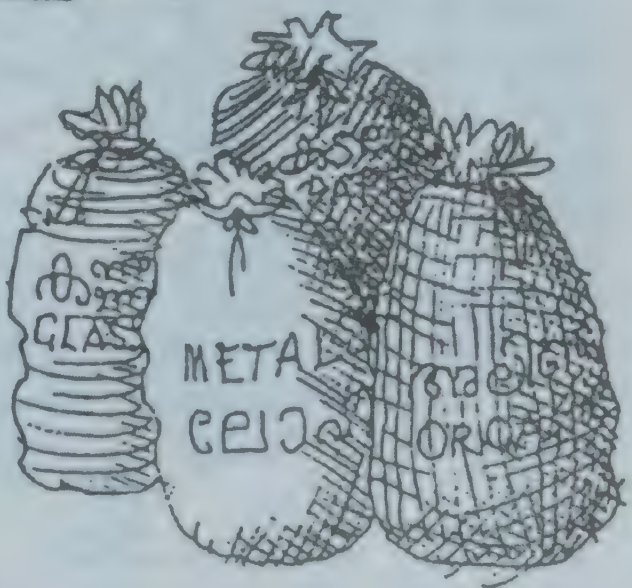
More economical than buildings, in this connection of supplying food & drink to visitors - is to provide umbrellas, tables & chairs - in easy reach of the Supply Kiosk.

Our typical tea + snack stalls (I often wonder who the joker was who gave them the title of 'hotels'?) are not only unsightly but also very unhygienic. almost invariably there is an adjoining pile of rubbish, together with a slippery muddy patch of land where cleaning water & 'slops' are thrown on to the nearby ground.

This sort of set-up should really be forbidden. It repells rather than attracts.

We must develope the system of separating and storing rubbish in plastic bags

And there MUST be a regular systematic clearance of these sacks.



RUBBISH REPELS TOURISTS

TOURIST & OTHER INFORMATION

This is another line on which we are woefully slack, poor and uninformative!

First of all there must not be only one information booth in one Town. They need to be found easily in or in bus and railway & boat stations.
They need to be at any place where a lot of tourists gather.

Second: These booths or Kiosks need to be distinctive so that you dont have to hunt for them in little side streets & out of the way old offices or houses!

Third Information must be reliable. Time and again one hears of incorrect information being given. It is better to be told "We dont Know" — than to be told that the bus you want "Will leave at 5 pm from here" — & later find that it left at 4 pm from behind 'there'!

these information booths are very important to the visitor & tourist & people should be properly trained & equipped for this work (R.L.E.G.P!) there is no need for more than one person in each booth.

Tourists do not want to waste time writing long letters to the folks at home!
They want typical local

PICTURE POSTCARDS

to let friends see where they are, & to let friends know that they are remembered.

"Am having a wonderful time in Alleppey — wish you were here - love from Laurie"

Whenever I try & get picture postcards in Kerala — all I can find are pictures of the Taj Mahal Maps, if accurate, are always also required but rarely available. These are simple aids to successful Tourism — but we rarely bother about them.

Larger Tourist Information Units are needed at Bus, Train, and Boat Stations.

Tourists have a regular set list of questions — all simple, Day-to Day Living questions.

.. How do I get to the Bus Station?
.. How far is it?
.. Where is there a Post Office / Box?
.. I want to go to the Police station.
.. Can you tell me of a good clean cheap hotel?
.. What is a 'lodge'?
.. Can you tell me where there is a public convenience?
(the information person must know the various names that different races use for a 'toilet'.)

They have Not come to look at posters of Kashmir + Jaisalmere. If you want to advertise — advertise the various + many attractions of Allappey + the Back waters!

Always only use up-to-date Time Tables!
Make or Get Simplified enlarged Timetables on the outside walls. Main items only are required.
Allappey To Cochin. Train - Bus. Boat. ?
Allappey To Kollam " " " ?
Allappey To Periyar " " " ? etc.

Get local craftsmen to carve distinctive prominent beautiful photogenic

SIGN POSTS.

If you want posters to be prominent, make them attractive & attractively displayed.

DO NOT USE WALLS for posters & spread it!

It is anti-social

AND it is anti TOURISM!

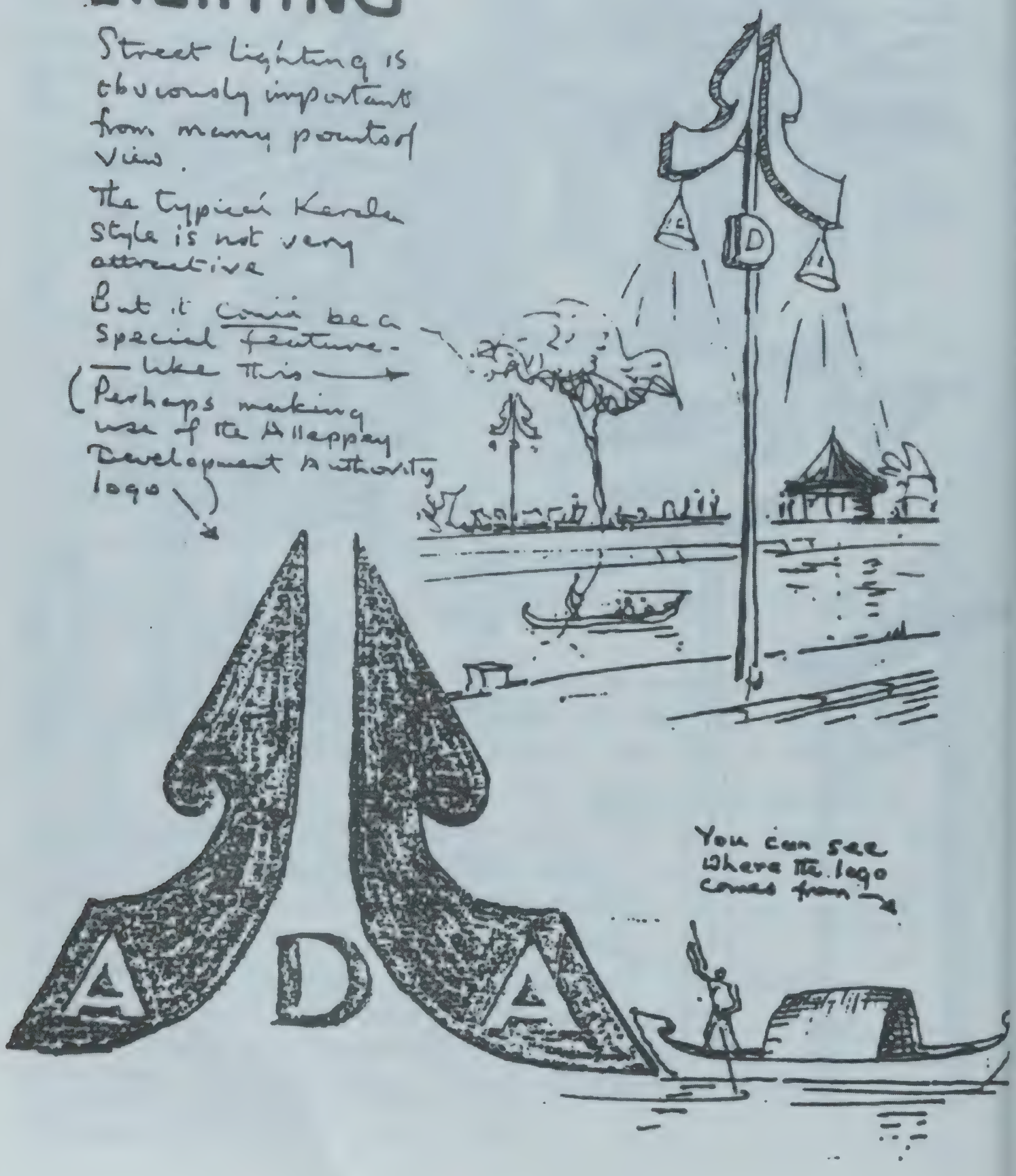
LIGHTING

Street lighting is obviously important from many points of view.

The typical Kerala style is not very attractive

But it could be a special feature. — like this →

(Perhaps making use of the Alleppey Development Authority logo ↘)



Below is an on the spot sketch of a typical K.S.E.B. light post.
(I have seen tourists taking photographs — "Guess what it is?")

Lighting on the canal side in Alleppey

Night-time floodlighting is always a delight to people, children and Tourists.

It is especially attractive when it can be reflected in the canal waters

It is also desirable that good lighting be available at seating and mini-garden & Kiosk areas.

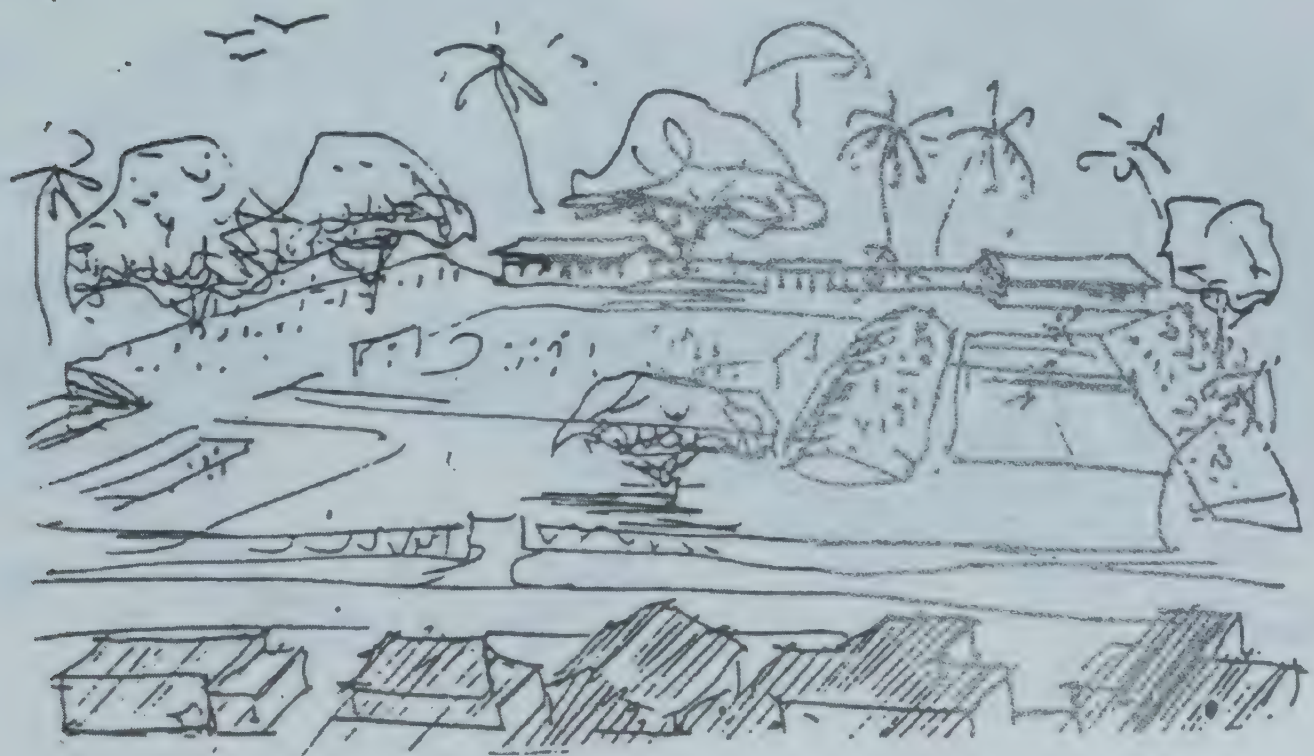
I was asked to consider & comment on three major development schemes
I. A pukka Sports Stadium
II Development of Stands for the Nehru Trophy Race area.
III The Boothapanda Kayal recreation Centre

There is a plot already tentatively booked for the big stadium (on the A.I.S. Road).
The typical large area type of stadium is ⟶ envisaged.
My observation is that these stadia are usually huge white elephants — used only occasionally — & very very costly to build AND to maintain
Only few "Sports ASSOCIATIONS" can afford to use these evergreen glorious astroturf wonders.
For example the Stadium in Trivandrum was put up against the advice of the Development Authority & a large part of the general public. It was built to be a "Great Asset". I doubt if it has been used more than half a dozen times for major national sports events and on the few times when school sports are shown there on T.V. most of its seats seem to be empty.

On the other hand, the open bit of land opposite to the Lighthouse & Guest House, is almost ⟶ always Continuously in use. People of all ages at all times are jogging, running, skipping, playing all kinds of games, learning to ride scooters & bicycles, besides playing matches of football Kabadi & so on. A man on the road with a barrow sells drinks etc.
There are no facilities except goal posts & a shady tree or two!
My opinion is that this & four or five other such open spaces, with a few more facilities (equipment & stores) showers, lockers & water taps — & earth banks for good & free viewing would be of far greater use & be appreciated by all, than one isolated large excessively costly stadium.
Get all our small essential needs attended to first!

LAKHS OR CRORES ?

HUNDREDS OR THOUSANDS ?



Below is a sketch of the stretch of water used every year for the world famous Nelson Trophy Race the very nature of the temporary, gay, colourful stands + pendals creates its own special atmosphere

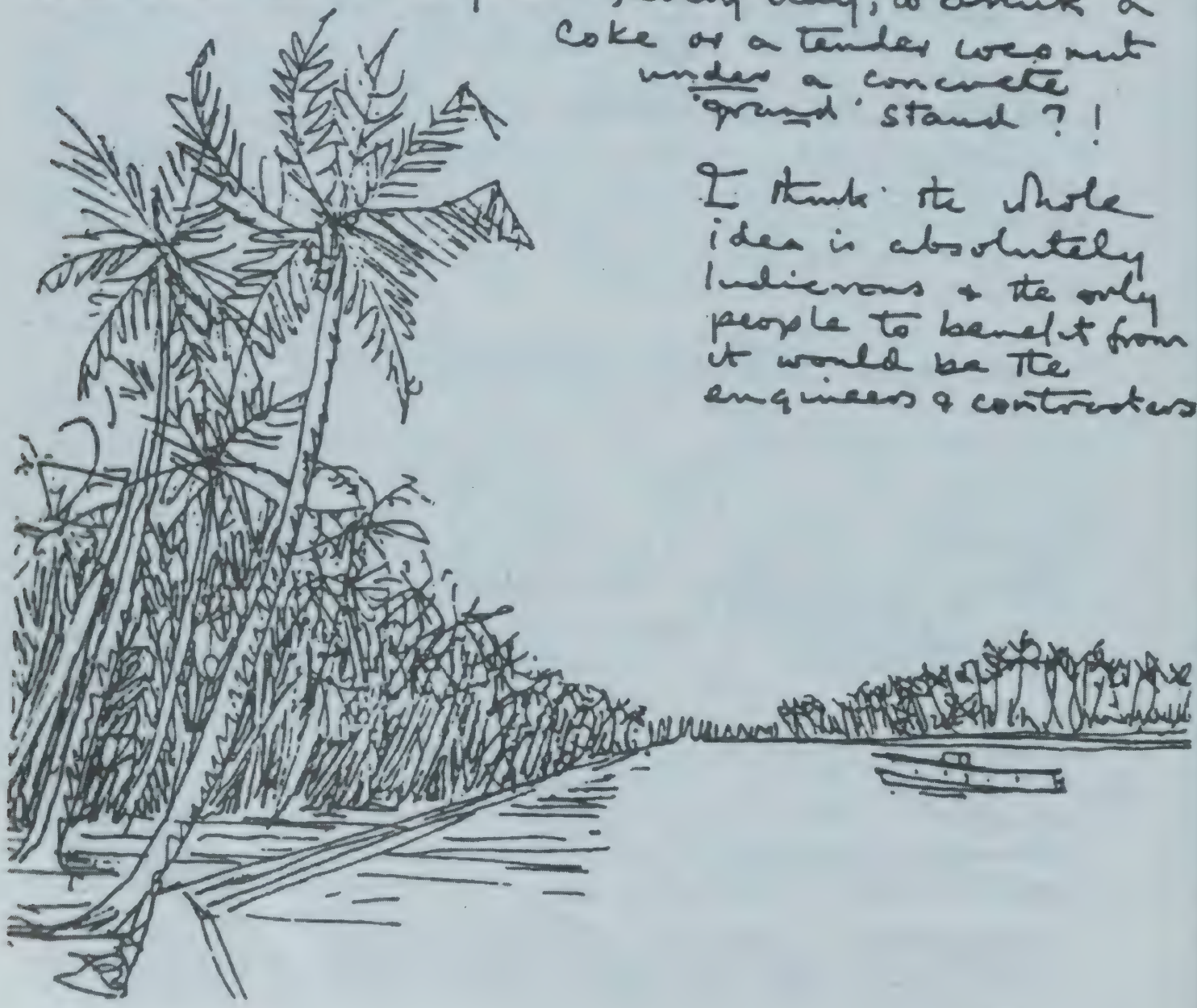
The proposal is to remove these palms and build a full course length concrete 'grand stand'

Frankly I cannot bring myself to sketch what such a monstrosity would look like for the other 364 days in the year.

Authorities say the undercroft of this grand stand could be used daily for cafes + shops + etc.

Do they really think the local populace and tourists will come all the way here, every day, to drink a Coke or a tender coconut under a concrete 'grand' stand ?!

I think the whole idea is absolutely ludicrous + the only people to benefit from it would be the engineers + contractors.



The Boothapanda Kayal is a large squarish sheet of water, separate from the back waters. It is 6 or 7 Kilometers from Alleppey. The proposal is to introduce water skiing, speed boats & other noisy, modern, speedy forms of "recreation". I will only speak of it concerning its being an Asset to Tourism. I can only repeat that tourists do not come half way round the world to indulge in third rate water sports in one of the least attractive Kayals around Alleppey.

As a family outing at a week end or festival there will be takers, but wealthy tourists, I'll wager, will prefer to be poled along the canals without the curse of loud film music deafening them.

I honestly & wholeheartedly believe that the people of Alappuzha can regain their fame and their prosperity by searching out and reviving all their many wonderful treasures — God & Man made ones.

At the present time — there is too much dirt & waste & an apparently Total lack of pride & love for the fine canals, buildings, trees, seashore, backwaters, history & legends that all go to make up a comparatively small town which, a hundred years ago was praised by world tourists & travellers and equalled with one of the greatest wealthiest world-famous royal cities in the whole world - Venice.

The Similarities are, or were, there, but now they are hidden, fortunately not destroyed.

Let Coir, Lime, Boatbuilding continue as long & as best they can, but let everyone concerned go to Alleppey and open their eyes & try & believe how fine the old buildings would be if repaired & painted. Try & see those dreamy fairy tale canals cleared of dirt & rubbish & floating refuse & weeds. Imagine the banks — clean, rubbish-free, tree-lined, little gardens

and play spaces, & attractive. Kerala style Kiosks & 'hotels', & seats to sit in, and watch the local world float noiselessly by!

There is still Peace & Beauty in, and all round -, Alleppey. In this noisy, strife-torn modern world Alleppey must understand that they are a rare almost unique blessing that the world needs.

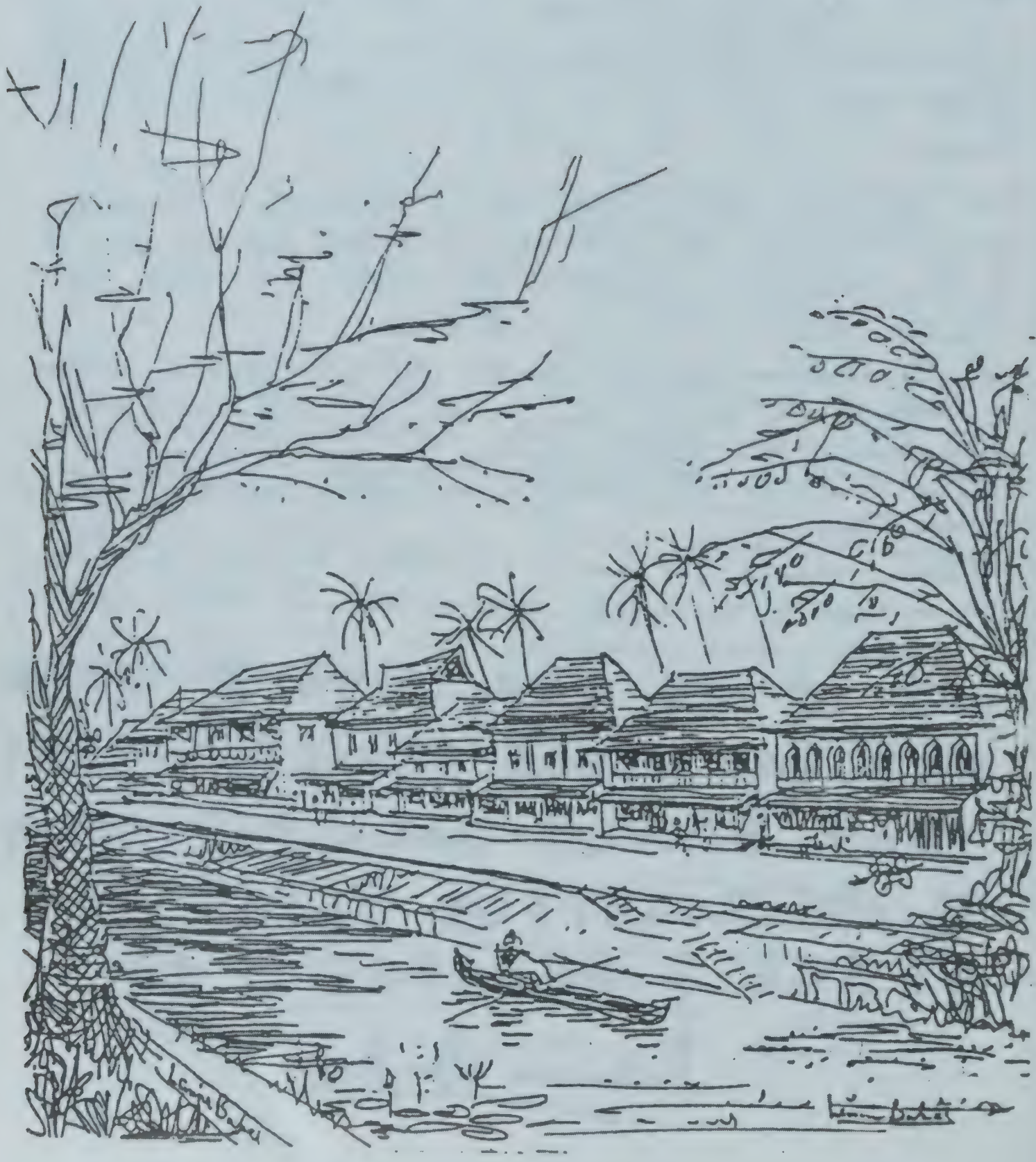
It is not only that the people of Alleppey can & will be proud of their home place but India & the world will be able to share that love & pride,

What needs to be done is not going to be costly. In fact the more the citizens of Alleppey do themselves, & for themselves & their town — the better & more wonderful it will be.

These days for most countries & most people the main aim in life seems only to make money

LET IT BE OUR LOVE & WORK AND NOT OTHER PEOPLES MONEY THAT BRINGS BACK ALLEPPEY TO ITS RIGHTFUL PLACE OF PEACE & PROSPERITY.

Laurie Baker



COSTFORD

The Centre of Science and Technology for Rural Development known by its acronym COSTFORD was established in 1985 to develop, demonstrate and disseminate alternative technologies that will ultimately change the social, economic and political positions of the poor, deprived and marginalized sections of society. The initial thrust area of the activities of COSTFORD was the diffusion of cost and energy effective alternatives to building technology. In consideration of the commendable work done by COSTFORD, the Government of Kerala has recognized it as an accredited agency to execute construction works using alternative technologies for all Government Departments and Agencies. Hundreds of architects and engineers trained by COSTFORD in Baker philosophy have become the change agents in the construction sector. It also gives special emphasis to the needs of women in society through training, organization and employment generation schemes.

COSTFORD extends consultancy services to Panchayati Raj Institutes for local economic development, decentralized planning and governance.

Besides, COSTFORD has also been interacting with students from various disciplines and has created a library and research centre on subjects that are relevant from the point of people-centred development. Annual memorial lectures by eminent public personalities and intellectuals are organised to commemorate the contributions of C. Achutha Menon, K.N. Raj and Laurie Baker. Special lectures and classes are also conducted on themes of topical interest.

COSTFORD has constructed a large number of buildings including houses for government and non-government institutions and families. In its quest to carry on the legacy of Laurie Baker, it has also been experimenting with alternative cost effective but environmentally-friendly materials such as bamboo, mud and wood. It has won several prizes and awards for its construction activities. More details can be accessed from its website: www.costford.org

COSTFORD has published 12 books authored by Laurie Baker and 30 books authored by others. A Malayalam quarterly "Puthuvazhi" is being published under its initiative to promote and popularize alternative perspectives on development, environment, gender, social oppression and culture.

LBC for Habitat Studies

The Laurie Baker Centre for Habitat Studies was established in 2009 to carry on the legacy of Laurie Baker. Located 12 kms from Trivandrum city in a lush campus of around 4 acres in the Vilappilsala Panchayat, it conducts training, research and publication activities. More details can be accessed from its website: www.lauriebakercentre.org

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THE AUTHOR

Laurence Wilfred Baker was not just a well-known architect. He was also a cartoonist, a man who loved nature and above all, a humanist. He was a Gandhian in his thoughts and deeds. Born in 1917 he became an Associate of the Royal Institute of Architects in the United Kingdom after studying at the Birmingham School of Architecture. A chance meeting with Mahatma Gandhi inspired and introduced him into India in 1944. Following this he lived and worked in India helping his Kerala-born wife and medical doctor Elizabeth Baker and also practicing his architecture in meeting the housing and living requirements of the rural poor. It was in a remote village, Pithoragarh, in the Himalayan region where they built their home, hospital and school. In the mid-sixties the Bakers moved to Kerala and made it their home.

After moving to the city of Trivandrum in 1970, Baker built several buildings including numerous houses and institutions that were cost effective as well as environment-friendly. The late C. Achutha Menon, the visionary Chief Minister of Kerala during 1969-77 was an admirer and ardent supporter of Baker's philosophy and approach to building construction. So was the late K.N. Raj, one of India's outstanding economists. Baker was closely associated with several governmental and other public institutions to advise on matters relating to cost effective building technology. He also mentored a large number of young architects who came to work and live in Trivandrum. He authored several books imparting knowledge on housing and building construction. He also drew cartoons and was also a painter. He and his wife led a life of simplicity and service. Laurie Baker passed away on 1st April 2007.

There are two organizations that carry on his legacy. One is the Centre of Science and Technology for Rural Development known as COSTFORD headquartered in Thrissur with units in Trivandrum and other districts in Kerala. This was jointly founded by C. Achutha Menon, K.N. Raj and Laurie Baker himself in 1985. The other is the Laurie Baker Centre for Habitat Studies located in Trivandrum and founded in 2009 under the initiative of COSTFORD activists with financial support from the Government of Kerala to undertake training, research, publication and other activities relating to the building of a green habitat following the philosophy and approach of Laurie Baker.

Centre of Science and Technology For Rural Development